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July, 1948

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April 21, 1948.

Mr. Lawrence E. Spivak,
Publisher,
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,
570 Lexington Avenue,
New York 22, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Spivak:

I am happy to inform you that as a result of nation-wide balloting by some two hundred members of Mystery Writers of America, Inc., members of your staff have won two of the six Edgar Allan Poe Awards for distinguished achievement in the mystery field during 1947. The winners:

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Sincerely

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President, MWA.

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Vol. 12, No. 56, JULY 1948. *Published monthly by The American Mercury, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U. S. and its possessions, and in the countries of the Pan-American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.*

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Entered as second class matter August 28, 1941, at the post office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U.S.A.

Published also in Australian and French editions by affiliated companies. Published in a Talking-Record Edition by the American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Kentucky.

Cover and Typography by George Salter

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2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The American Mercury, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1948.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas 1948. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1949.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine first book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $50 for the original edition, $25 for cheap editions, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story.

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SPECIAL PRIZE FOR THE BEST SHERLOCKIANA

Robert Arthur was born thirty-odd years ago in the Philippine Islands, on Corregidor Island. His father was an Army officer and young Bob was raised in various Army posts. Nevertheless, Mr. Arthur cannot boast with other writers of any particularly colorful career — no extensive globe-trotting, no fascinating variety of pre-writing occupations, not even any jail sentences. All his mature life he has been either a writer or an editor, and that's that. But he is married to a beautiful Hungarian girl, and how many writers can boast that? *Mrs. Arthur, having a happy temperament, writes serious stories; Mr. Arthur, having a morbid temperament, writes nothing but entertainment. They live in the country, in a fine old Colonial house with a new oil burner which, thanks to the cracks in the house walls, efficiently heats the outdoors for a considerable distance in all directions . . .*

Mr. Arthur's prize-winning story represents an amalgam of four ideas which floated around in the author's mind for a long period. These four ideas in search of a catalyst were not mere rolling stones; consequently, they gathered a sort of mental moss, and when at last the seemingly disassociated and unharmonious elements fused, they emerged in a way that surprised even the author.

Idea Number One was a desire to evolve a new variation of the murderer-who-gets-away-with-it. Idea Number Two was a refinement of that theme: to write a story in which the murderer solves his own crime. Idea Number Three was the nostalgic notion which all detective-story writers have tucked away in a secret corner of their hearts and which most of them succumb to sooner or later: to do a take-off — pastiche, burlesque, or satire — on Sherlock Holmes. And Idea Number Four was to exploit the detectival possibilities in W. H. Sheldon's two amazing books, VARIETIES OF HUMAN PHYSIQUE *and* VARIETIES OF TEMPERAMENT, *which Robert Arthur first learned of when he read Aldous Huxley's summary in "Harper's" some years ago.*

These four heterogeneous Ideas kept stewing in their own juices — "the mental chaos," according to Mr. Arthur, "which is part of a writer's creative process." Well, Nature being what she is, and creative processes being what they are, the Four Ideas eventually made passes at each other; they caressed and snuggled and ultimately — the climax of all courtships — they embraced.

So a marriage was arranged.

And this consummation, so devoutly to be wished, produced a child which the author christened "The Adventure of the Single Footprint."

And this bloodhound bambino, this criminous cub, is something of a child prodigy — the most ingenious descendant of Sherlockian genetics and eugenics to be born in many a year. Your Editor has only one regret: that this murderous moppet could not have been included in our suppressed anthology, THE MISADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES *(requiescat in pace).*

Postscript (by Robert Arthur): It's a hard way to write a story and I don't recommend it.

Serious Note: The two Sheldon books are real — not at all imaginary. Sheldon claims that there are only three basic physical types in the world, and only a definite, limited number of combinations and degrees of these three types. Each of the subtypes is determined by physical measurements, and once the specific subtype is ascertained, the individual must, according to Sheldon, adhere closely to a temperamental and physiological pattern common to that subtype. A wide divergence from the norm indicates insanity. The Sheldon system, therefore, makes it possible for a detective, given the physical type of a suspect, to deduce the nature of his character; and vice versa, knowing the character of a suspect, to deduce his physical attributes. In other words — child's-play.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SINGLE FOOTPRINT

by ROBERT ARTHUR

LIEUTENANT OLIVER BAYNES of the State Police was squatting beside a footprint in a newly seeded section of lawn when I reached Hilltop, and a small photographer in large horn-rim glasses was capturing the print on celluloid, protesting bitterly against the tricky close-ups Baynes demanded. The job finished, he fled, but Baynes remained brooding over the print for a moment longer before he rose up to his full five feet seven.

"Thought there was a story here for you," he greeted me, his large red face solemn. "But it's a suicide verdict."

"It didn't sound like suicide over the phone. It sounded very fancy."

"I know." Baynes waved a ham-like hand toward the high wire fence that surrounded Lawford Holmes's hunting lodge and its five acres of

well-treed grounds — grounds swarming now with State Troopers, local officers, and anyone else who could find an excuse to get in.

The fence was an impressive barrier. Ten feet high, it was topped by a V of barbed wire. All trees or brush within half a dozen feet on either side of it had been removed, and any over-hanging branches that were low enough to touch it had been cut away.

"It's electrified," Baynes said. "The Holmes Gun people tested new small-arms models here during the war. A big alarm rings if the fence is cut or short-circuited, or even touched. The system is guaranteed fool-proof. The alarm didn't ring last night — so the fence wasn't tampered with. And there aren't any marks on the ground near it, either. Anyway, even if you used a ladder, you couldn't get over it without touching it and setting off the alarm.

"So it looks as if nobody from the outside got in here last night. And if nobody got in, Lawford Holmes wasn't killed. He shot himself."

"Then why are you so interested in this footprint?"

Baynes looked down at it. The footprint — only half a print, really, for it showed merely a deep toe indentation — was midway between two flagstoned walks, some twelve feet from each other. Overhanging branches of a large pine had killed the lawn with shade, and a recent reseeding had left the ground bare and slightly soft, or the print would not have registered. The grass beyond the walks was too thick to take an impression.

"The print wasn't here before last night," Baynes said. "The gardener swears to it, and he watered here at sundown. It was made by a man running toward the house. It's quite narrow, but it's just a toeprint, so it doesn't tell us much. It's the only evidence we've got that there could have been an outsider in these grounds last night. The other evidence says nobody could get through the fence without setting off the alarm, so the print must have been made by the gardener. But he insists it wasn't."

For a moment Baynes stood lost in thought, absently rubbing his bulbous nose with the side of his thumb. Then, for no reason, the mournful hoot of a freight train in the valley below made him nod. He turned toward the lodge where Lawford Holmes, president of the Holmes Gun and Iron Works, sat dead in his study with a Holmes bullet in his brain.

"Come on," he said. "You'll want to see the body, as long as you're here. Dead since about midnight, the doctors say. There was nobody here with him last night except the gardener and his wife, and the butler, Raymond, who make up the permanent staff."

"Why couldn't one of them have killed him?"

"The gardener and his wife went to bed at nine-thirty. They alibi each other and I believe them, because they had easy berths here and they had no motive. Raymond has been

with Holmes for fifteen years, and got a whopping salary for being discreet. He's out too."

"Somebody hiding here ahead of time?"

"He'd have been found this morning — the fence keeps people in just as effectively as it keeps them out. So that's not the answer. Anyway, Holmes drove up here unexpectedly yesterday, bringing only Raymond with him. On the way he stopped off at Glen Rest — that's the swanky sanitarium where his nephew Jack is locked up, crazy as a coot — "

"I know Jack Holmes," I interposed.

"You do?" Baynes's small blue eyes flashed me a glance. "Know him well?"

"We roomed together in college for a year. I was doing graduate work and was a good deal older, but we got along fine. I remember him as a tall, bright kid, good at debating and basket ball. For some reason I always thought he'd go places."

"Know anything about him since college?"

"Just the highlights — his father's death here at Hilltop, Jack's war record, his wound, his mental breakdown after he got back — the kind of things you read in the papers."

"Mmm. Anyway, Lawford Holmes stopped to ask how Jack was doing, then drove on here. He got here at six and the fence was turned on right away."

"What was he afraid of?"

"Nothing in particular. Of course, he had enemies who wouldn't have minded killing him — former employees, business associates he'd cheated, the brother of a woman he was mixed up with — but none of them were on his trail so far as we know. He just liked to feel secure.

"He had dinner, then went to his study to read. Raymond left him there reading at eleven and went to bed. Some time in the next hour, Lawford Holmes died. But nobody heard the shot or any kind of outcry. . . . Well, here's the house. It wasn't locked. Lawford Holmes depended on his electric fence."

We went up fieldstone steps, through an open door and down a wide hall, to turn into a small room with a picture window showing a breath-taking view of the Berkshire peaks across the valley. But the view inside the room stole the show.

Beside a reading lamp opposite the doorway was an easy chair, and in it sat an enormously fat man with porcine features. His head was rolled grotesquely to one side, the tiny eyes open and staring. The blackened area of a contact wound showed on his right temple.

As he slumped there, the dead man's arms dangled beside the arms of the chair. And just beneath each limp hand a .32 Holmes automatic lay on the rug.

"Raymond found him like that at eight this morning, the light still burning," Baynes said. "A pretty picture of a suicide, isn't it?"

"With *two* guns?" I exclaimed.

"I've heard of two-gun killers, but I've never heard of a two-gun suicide before!"

"The left gun didn't fire. A defective bullet jammed in the barrel."

"You mean he tried it, the gun jammed, so he dropped it and used another?" I asked. "Or what? Was it suicide or wasn't it?"

Baynes heaved a sigh.

"No," he said. "I don't think it's suicide. Not just on account of the two guns, or even the footprint. But it doesn't *feel* like suicide to me."

"But you haven't any evidence to prove different?"

"Just the footprint. And you might call this evidence."

He indicated the paneled wall beside the doorway. A few inches from the door jamb there was a small indentation in the paneling. In the polished floor directly beneath was another dent, larger but shallower.

"The butler swears those weren't there yesterday."

"What do they mean?"

"Your guess is as good as mine." Baynes stared darkly at the dead man, so grossly different from his brother, Harrison Holmes, founder of the company. From his portrait on the wall above the fat man's body, Harrison Holmes looked down aloofly, tall, white-haired, fiercely honest.

"It'll go down as suicide," Baynes said, after a moment. "Just like his brother's death went down as an accident."

"Harrison?" I exclaimed. "Jack's father? He fell off a cliff here during the war. Are you trying to tell me he was murdered too?"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything. But during the war a big shipment of defective Holmes ammunition hit the battlefields. Harrison brought his production chief, his brother Lawford, and some section managers up here for private questioning. Harrison fell over a cliff while he and his brother were out walking in the middle of that questioning."

"You mean Lawford Holmes was responsible for the bad ammunition? He killed his brother to keep the facts from coming out?"

"Nobody ever proved it. In fact, nobody was ever officially blamed for the bad ammunition. It just stopped appearing. But after his brother died, Lawford took over the company. Jack was in a hospital in Italy then, with a bad head wound. . . . He could have had a military exemption, but he enlisted. Rose to be a major."

I nodded. That side of Jack's history had been played up in the newspapers.

"What are you getting at?"

Oliver Baynes beamed at me. He has helped me get many a true crime story which I have written up, with a reward in publicity to him — and no official shuns publicity. But behind the face and figure of a bloated pixie Baynes hides the soul of a frustrated dramatist. He loves to be mysterious, as if to prove that life, properly stage-managed, can be more startling than any of my fictions.

"I'm trying to tell you how Jack

Holmes got to be crazy," he retorted. "Didn't you ever wonder?"

"Yes, of course. I meant to make inquiries, but I never did."

"That's how it goes. Well, it was his uncle's fault." He gestured toward the dead man, lolling mutely before us. "When Jack got out of the Army, a year after his dad died, Lawford was running the company. Jack tried to get the company back but this cute fellow had fixed the by-laws somehow, making himself practically the permanent president. Jack was licked.

"He began to brood. He suspected his uncle had killed his father, he was pretty sure Lawford had been behind the bad ammunition, and he knew he was trying to steal the company. And Jack couldn't do a thing about any of that. So he jumped his mental rails to get away from a conflict he couldn't resolve, and they had to lock him up."

"What form does his dementia take?"

"He thinks he's somebody he isn't."

"Who?"

"The other Holmes."

"What other Holmes? Oliver Wendell?"

"Not Oliver Wendell, no. I thought you mystery writers have only one Holmes."

"Wait a minute!" I cried. "You don't mean he thinks he's — "

"That's right." Baynes chuckled. This was the moment he'd been leading me up to. "He thinks he's Sherlock Holmes in the flesh."

"But that's — " I'd been about to say, "That's impossible!" But of course it wasn't. Plenty of people think they're Napoleon or Julius Caesar or Genghis Khan.

"It's perfectly natural, according to the doctors," Baynes went on. "As a boy, Jack was tall, skinny, and eagle-beaked. His full name is John Sherwin Holmes. What else could the other kids call him but Sherlock?

"He liked it. He boasted that Sherlock Holmes was a relative. He read all the stories and made up plays about him and acted in them. Of course, it was just a game and he outgrew it. But when he came back from the war, shaky from his wound and combat fatigue, he ran head-on into his uncle and found himself helpless. So mentally he retreated to his carefree boyhood. Instead of being John Sherwin Holmes he became somebody else — somebody big and important. Sherlock Holmes."

"Good Lord!"

"I was wondering — how'd you like to call on him this afternoon?"

"Call on him? Why?"

Baynes glanced again at the gross figure of the dead man so close to us, seeming to stare at us out of tiny pig eyes that saw nothing.

"There's nothing more we can do here," he said. "But maybe if we call on Jack, we can make his uncle cure him."

"But his uncle's dead! How can he cure Jack?"

"By being dead," Baynes answered.

Glen Rest covers fifty acres in the Berkshires some forty miles south of

Hilltop. A large central building that might be a summer resort is surrounded by individual cottages, each on its own grounds. Inmates who are merely rich are kept in the main building. The cottages are for those who are more than rich and who are, of course, nonviolent.

Most of the inmates are permitted to move freely through the grounds during the day, accompanied by attendants. Restraint is imposed by a high brick wall, patroled day and night by guards who travel in pairs. But the guards remain unobtrusive and the wall is screened by trees and flowering shrubs. The resort atmosphere is seldom disturbed and any harmless whim within reason is indulged.

At Glen Rest, as Baynes observed, you can live in your own private Mount Vernon if you think you're George Washington and ride around on your own white horse if you think you're Paul Revere.

We reached there late in the afternoon, driving down from Hilltop in Baynes's car after Baynes had bullied the small photographer into rushing through a comprehensive set of photographs for him. When we left, the activity within the fenced-in grounds had ceased; no evidence of murder other than the single footprint had been found.

At Glen Rest Baynes disappeared for twenty minutes into the main office. Then we drove on to a small, English-type cottage two hundred yards away. Maples surrounded it, and in the backyard stood a dozen bee hives.

"This is where they keep Jack," Baynes said, stopping. "He hasn't been out of the grounds in more than a year now — I just asked. And he hasn't seen his uncle since he was admitted. Lawford stopped in from time to time to ask about him, but the sight of his uncle made Jack so violent that the two were never permitted to meet."

"Now perhaps you'll tell me what crazy idea you have for curing him?"

"It's not crazy. The doctors okayed it. You see, his uncle is the immovable object Jack ran into. As soon as he learns his uncle is dead, and the obstacle no longer exists, he may snap back to normal."

"Then why not wait and show him a newspaper clipping telling of his uncle's death?"

"That's too direct. The unbalanced mind throws up defenses against evidence from the normal world. So I'm going to sneak up on his blind side."

"I don't follow you."

"It's like this. I'm calling on Jack now as Inspector Baynes of Scotland Yard, coming to ask Sherlock Holmes for help on a case — the murder of Lawford Holmes, a distant family connection."

I reacted in a manner to satisfy even Baynes's sense of drama. Then I added: "It might work — if he's crazy enough to believe your story about wanting his help."

"He'll believe it. I've dropped in before, using cases that were bother-

ing me as an excuse. Damned if he didn't give me a couple of suggestions. Outside his delusion, or inside it rather, his mind clicks fine.

"I got interested in him more than a year ago because I'm partly responsible for his being here. I was out on a patrol with one of our troopers when a car passed doing eighty. Jack was at the wheel. He told us he was Sherlock Holmes, and was testing the comparative speed of different motor cars for a monograph he was writing on automotive vehicles and their uses in apprehending criminals."

"I'd like to have seen your face!"

"I thought he was being wise. But when he learned my name, he fell on me like a long-lost brother. It seems there's a Baynes in one of the Sherlock stories."

"That's right. Inspector Baynes in *The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge.* A smart officer."

"I know, I read it. Anyway, we took Jack home and a month later he was here at Glen Rest. He used to have lucid intervals but now the slightest suggestion that he's not the real Sherlock Holmes sets him off into a kind of fit. So we have to be careful."

"I'll be careful. But just what do you want me to do?"

"You're going to play Dr. Watson."

"Dr. Watson!"

"That's right. You're blond, pudgy, and English-looking, and he'll remember you as an old friend and accept you. But you haven't seen him since he left London. You see those bee hives out back?"

"Yes. Good Lord, you mean he's — "

"He's retired. This is his cottage in Sussex, where he's raising bees. His nurse-housekeeper is Mrs. Hudson, who's come down from London to look after him. Now we're going in. Just be Dr. Watson — ask questions and make remarks that aren't too bright. But remember, play it straight."

(We did "play it straight." Consequently I have taken the liberty, in the following section of these notes, of writing it "straight" — to keep the narrative from becoming hopelessly confused between our real and assumed identities.)

Upon Baynes's knock the cottage door was opened by Mrs. Hudson, whose pleasant face brightened as she saw us.

"Come in, Inspector Baynes!" she exclaimed. "And Dr. Watson! Mr. Holmes has been waiting ever since your phone call. He said to show you into the study."

Mrs. Hudson rustled starchily ahead of us into a small, incredibly cluttered den.

"I'll call Mr. Holmes right away," she said. "He's out in back with his bees — trying out what different vitamins will do to the honey."

She rustled out again, and I seized the opportunity to inspect the books and papers which spilled from shelves all around the room and teetered in Pisan towers on the floor. Holmes had always been an omnivorous

reader, and it was evident the habit persisted even here, for the books I saw covered twenty different subjects or more.

All the newspapers and magazines were English. Sheets of foolscap covered with a large, flowing handwriting were strewn across the desk. Two books lay open across them, as if recently consulted: Sheldon's VARIETIES OF HUMAN PHYSIQUE and VARIETIES OF TEMPERAMENT. More I had no chance to observe, for footsteps came down the hall and an instant later Holmes himself came in. He wore old tweeds and was engaged in removing beekeeper gloves and helmet, which he dropped carelessly into the middle of the room.

"Watson!" he cried, seizing my hand in a crushing grip, the well-remembered features breaking into a smile. "Forgive my exuberance, but I have few visitors, and the country air has improved my health so much that I can hardly find an outlet for my energies."

He flung himself into an old Morris chair and pulled open the door of a cabinet beside him. I could see now that his face was thin and haggard, looking older than his years warranted, and there was a certain glint of wildness in his eyes which had never been there before. Otherwise, he was hardly changed from the last time I had seen him.

"Watson — Inspector Baynes," he said, drawing a bottle, three glasses, and a seltzer-maker from the cabinet, "you'll have some refreshment, I'm sure. You've had a long trip and no doubt you've talked yourself dry about the case on the way down."

"Case?" I asked. "What case, Holmes?"

"I can hardly tell that yet. But since you have prepared yourself with a folded wad of copy paper in one pocket and four sharpened pencils in the other, you certainly plan to take notes. And if not of a case which you hope to write up, then of what?"

"Oh, of course," I muttered. Baynes grinned at me. Holmes poured out three drinks and added a squirt of seltzer to each.

"Quite an improvement over the old gasogene, eh, Watson?" he remarked as he handled the gleaming soda-maker. "Which you were always secretly afraid would explode. . . . Well, gentlemen, to use that prevalent Americanism which so aptly covers our mutual interest, here's to crime!"

We all drank, and Holmes turned to Inspector Baynes.

"I grant you, Baynes," he said, "that the case is baffling, colorful, and important. But really, I cannot undertake it. I am retired."

"But you don't know yet what case we've come to consult you about, Mr. Holmes!" Baynes protested.

"It must be colorful, or Watson would not deem it worthy of his talents," Holmes remarked, directing a glance at me. "Baffling, or you would not be here, and important, or you would not have gone to the length of bringing Watson along to

exert pressure on me to take it. But the day of the individualist in crime detection is past. Modern criminology is the science of massed attack. Whole regiments of men at telephones and microscopes, whole armies of girls at filing cabinets — today they net the malefactor. The few carefully selected facts with which the individual craftsman can work are puny artillery indeed in modern warfare against crime. I've outlived my day, and I'm wise enough to know it."

"I was afraid you'd feel like that, Mr. Holmes," Baynes said regretfully. "But just the same, I hope you'll help me out. For one thing, this case involves, I believe, a distant family connection of yours."

"Indeed?" The massive eyebrows rose, the hawk-nose flared. "My family connections are scanty enough. Which, pray, do you refer to? And is the individual the malefactor or the victim?"

"I'm speaking of Lawford Holmes, the munitions maker," Baynes said. "He's been murdered."

"Murdered?" Holmes's face lit up. The wild expression seemed to leave his eyes. "Yes, I believe Lawford Holmes is a connection, though I've never traced the exact degree of consanguinity. When did he die?"

"Last night, at his lodge, about forty miles from here."

"Tell me about it, my dear Inspector." Holmes leaned back, filled an ancient briar, and lit it.

Baynes then went into a careful, detailed recital of the circumstances of Lawford Holmes's death. Puffing at his pipe, Holmes listened, following the narrative carefully. Baynes emphasized the absence of clues, save for the single half-footprint and the two dubious dents in the library woodwork. When he had finished describing the position in which the dead man's body had been found, with a recently fired gun beneath his right hand and one with the barrel jammed beneath his left, Holmes sat up and knocked the dottle from his pipe.

"Curious!" he remarked. "Decidedly curious! Several possibilities present themselves, each with a certain appeal. How do you read this riddle, Watson?"

"I see nothing in the facts that establishes murder at all," I replied. "Since it looks so much like suicide, why can we not assume it *was* suicide?"

"And how do you explain the second gun, the one that jammed?" Holmes asked, watching me with a slight smile.

"Possibly Lawford Holmes was examining it — it may have been left over from the investigation into the defective ammunition which the factory issued," I answered. "He may have suddenly felt remorse for sending brave men to their death with other such faulty bullets, and thereupon killed himself."

"Bravo!" Holmes applauded. "An ingenious theory, entirely worthy of you, Watson. But better suited to literary than practical purposes, I fancy. And what, Baynes, is the offi-

cial theory — for I assume that the authorities have arrived at some conclusion?"

"The official explanation," Baynes said gloomily, "is that in a freakish mood of despondency Lawford Holmes decided to kill himself by firing two shots into his head simultaneously, with a gun in each hand. One gun fired and the other jammed, accounting for their positions beside his chair."

"Ingenious, decidedly ingenious!" Holmes agreed. "But you don't believe it, eh?"

"No, I don't believe it. Lawford Holmes wasn't the kind of man to kill himself. But now if you're going to ask me *my* theory, Mr. Holmes, the best I can do is say that it looks to me like a vengeance murder. The killer may have been a former serviceman whose life was endangered by defective Holmes ammunition. Or he may have lost a buddy, killed on account of a jammed gun.

"So he brought back the useless gun with him, determined to have vengeance on the man responsible — in this case, Lawford Holmes, head of the company. Having killed his man and made it look like suicide, he dropped the other gun as a subtle sign of justice accomplished."

"A distinct possibility," Holmes acknowledged. "That is, if — was either gun an Army-issue weapon?"

Baynes's face fell.

"No," he admitted. "That's the trouble with the theory. The gun that killed Lawford Holmes was his own, commonly kept in his desk drawer. The other is untraceable. It has no serial number and apparently was removed from the factory before being stamped. Of course, Lawford Holmes himself could easily have got hold of an un-numbered gun — so we're back to the suicide theory again. But I don't believe it," he finished doggedly.

"Neither do I. The Holmes blood line is an aggressive one, not given to suicide, as you rightly remarked. Well, Baynes, you have an intriguing puzzle on your hands. It would interest me to attempt it, but I must not let myself be tempted. I have retired. I'm sure you will succeed without my help."

"I wish I could be as sure," Baynes said wryly. "The trouble is, I've only the footprint and the two dents in the woodwork, and I'm afraid they aren't clues enough."

"A slender stock, I agree. But even a single footprint, my dear Baynes, when studied with sufficient care has been known to reveal volumes."

Baynes brightened. "Perhaps you'd be willing to look at it for me?" he suggested. "I don't mean necessarily to go to the scene, but I have a very good photograph with me."

Holmes hesitated, and I swiftly interposed: "Surely it can do no harm to glance at a photograph, Holmes. I daresay you can tell nothing from it, but why not look anyway?"

Holmes appeared, I thought, nettled.

"As you say, Watson, why not?"

he agreed. "Let us examine, then, your picture of this single print, Baynes. And of the two small dents in the library woodwork, if you have pictures of them as well. It is conceivable we may extract something from them despite Watson's scepticism."

Baynes dug into the battered briefcase he had brought with him and produced a handful of photographs, still slightly damp.

"I have pictures of the whole scene here," he said hopefully. "The grounds, the house, the electrified fence, the position of the body —"

"No, no!" Holmes cried. "You are thorough, Baynes. When you say there are no other clues, I have confidence in the statement."

Thus restrained, Baynes dug through the photographs, selected six, and handed these to Holmes. Three showed the single footprint — a close-up and two general views of the surrounding grounds. The other three showed the small dents in the library woodwork, both in close-up and from a distance of a few feet.

To these latter Holmes first applied himself, taking a large reading glass from the desk to assist him. Presently he passed them to me and sat back, drumming the tips of his fingers against the arms of his chair.

"Suggestive, most suggestive," he murmured. "What a deal of train-catching and hansom riding the art of photography could have saved us in our earlier days, had it been sufficiently advanced, eh, Watson?"

"Very possibly," I agreed. "But as for these marks being suggestive, to me they suggest nothing save a careless housemaid knocking a broom handle about."

"Come, Watson!" Holmes remonstrated. "Baynes says these marks did not exist prior to the murder. Then logic tells us they must have been made during its commission, eh?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so."

"And two dents in highly polished woodwork, one on the wall, the other in the floor directly below — their position tells you nothing?"

"I suppose something hit the wall and fell to the floor."

"Bravo, Watson, we progress! Something heavy, obviously. And something that was thrown. Nothing dropped accidentally could have made both marks."

"I suppose not. But what?"

"What indeed? Let us go back a bit. Whatever it was, who threw it? Who must have thrown it?"

"Why, Lawford Holmes, I daresay. His chair faced the door."

"Exactly, Lawford Holmes. And under what circumstances does one hurl heavy objects with reckless disregard for valuable woodwork? At an intruder, to be sure. Thus we establish that Lawford Holmes was not taken unawares, but did make an effort to defend himself."

"But what did he throw?" I demanded. "If the dents tell you so much, they must surely tell you that!"

"We do not need the dents for that information. What else could the dead man have thrown but a gun which, having failed to fire, was useful only as a missile? Eh, Baynes?"

"Very sound, Mr. Holmes, very sound indeed!" Baynes applauded.

"But that would mean Lawford Holmes actually had the gun in his hand when the killer entered!" I objected.

Holmes shrugged. "Not necessarily."

"I disagree!" I told him. "And if Lawford Holmes had the gun in his hand, that means he had some warning of the killer's approach. But in that case why didn't he take his other gun, customarily kept in his desk? Why didn't he ring for the butler or make an outcry? The gun having failed to fire, how was he killed so as to simulate suicide and without any sign of a struggle? How ——"

"Softly, Watson, softly." Holmes held up a restraining hand. "You are beclouding the issue in complications. I can, however, suggest one hypothesis which answers all such questions."

"And what is it?" I cried.

Holmes pondered for a moment. Then he shook his head.

"No, Watson. In the absence of other data it must remain, after all, guesswork. And you know how I feel about guesswork. Further inference from these two small indentations must wait for the accumulation of more facts. Let us now turn our attention to the footprint which so interests Baynes."

So saying, he took up the photographs of the toeprint. For some minutes he studied them through his glass. Then he put them down.

"Well, this is more informative!" he exclaimed, obviously pleased. "You underestimated the value of your footprint, Baynes. While it does not tell us the guilty man's name, nor the color of his suit, nor, alas, his nationality or politics, I fancy it gives us otherwise a comprehensive view both of his person and personality, together with full information regarding his mode of entrance to and exit from the grounds."

"What?" Baynes straightened and stared at Holmes incredulously. "You can read all that in a picture of a footprint?"

"If it were a full footprint, instead of but a half a one, perhaps I could read more," Holmes replied calmly. "Let us approach this photograph with only logic for our guide, and see what result we achieve. What have we? A toeprint in seeded ground, deeply indented. Our first postulate is that it was made by a man running swiftly. Do you agree?"

"Agree?" Baynes asked. "Oh, yes, I agree, Mr. Holmes."

"But the print indicates the man who made it was running *toward* the house, not away from it. Consequently he can not have been fleeing. And you have said there was no outcry or alarm of any kind."

"That's right," Baynes agreed cautiously. "No, he couldn't have been fleeing."

"But there can have been no rea-

son for him to run toward the house before the murder — his whole approach, as we visualize it, was one of stealth. Consequently his running was neither to flee nor to attack. For what other reason might a man conceivably run at high speed?"

Holmes paused, but neither Baynes nor I answered. After a moment he continued.

"One other possibility comes to mind," he stated. "He might have been running to gain momentum."

"Momentum?" I asked, blankly. "Why momentum?"

"Why, indeed? Let us examine the picture again. The shade of the overhanging branches of a pine tree has killed the lawn. One such branch is visible in the picture — some twelve feet, I estimate, directly above the print in question."

"Yes," Baynes corroborated. "Twelve feet is about right."

"Then our picture is complete!" Holmes exclaimed. "The toe indentation is really too deep to have been made by a man merely running. We can state confidently that he was not, indeed, running. He was *jumping*. The print, in fact, was made as our man leaped for that branch, twelve feet above the ground."

"Some jump!" I exclaimed.

"Some jump, as you inelegantly phrase it, Watson. Surely your English has become more Americanized in recent years? The effect of seeing too many gangster cinemas, I daresay. But a jump within the capabilities of an athletic man."

"But, if he did jump for the branch, why?" I asked. "Surely he wasn't going to hide in the tree?"

"Of course not. There was no alarm and no necessity to hide. But in this picture the branches of the pine interlace with those of another tree closer to the electrified fence. And those in turn — the photograph does not show it, but it must be so — interlace with other trees, extending to the other side of the fence. Our killer, then, came and went through the branches of the trees, climbing one on the outside, swinging through high *above* the fence, dropping into the grounds, and departing in the same manner once his mission was accomplished."

"You've hit it, Mr. Holmes!" Baynes exclaimed. "You've hit it! It's the only answer!"

"But it would take a Tarzan to do it!" I objected.

"Then a Tarzan we must postulate," Holmes said confidently. "As Baynes has said, it is the only answer logic permits."

"But you said, Mr. Holmes," Baynes put in, "that the print told you what our man looks like, and his personality too. You were just joking, I expect?"

"Joking?" Holmes repeated. "I never joke on such matters. Let us pursue our analysis further. This single print is midway between two walks twelve feet apart. His previous step, we may assume, came upon a flagstone, otherwise it would have registered. Our man's running stride then is at least six feet — the stride of

a tall man. Likewise it would take a tall man to make the leap to the branch in question. The toeprint is a narrow one. A narrow foot indicates small bones, a slender man. Equally, such a venturesome trip through the trees would be impossible to a man of great weight. Consequently we may say with confidence that our man is tall and slender. He is also, obviously, athletic."

Baynes shook his head in admiration.

"I thought there was nothing to be told by that print," he remarked, "but you have proved me wrong. But surely, Mr. Holmes, you can tell nothing more from it."

"Only a very little," he said modestly. "Nothing, in fact, save that in addition to being tall, slender, and athletic, the man you seek probably eats sparingly, does not enjoy strong drink, and occasionally suffers from nervous irritability and insomnia. I might venture to add that he probably plays bridge better than he does poker, is intelligent, capable of meticulous planning, but at the same time is emotional and even on occasion reckless. At times he is sociable and fond of athletics, but at other times will become moody and given to solitary pastimes. Beyond these small facts, however, I am unable to go."

"Come now, Holmes!" I cried indignantly. "You're making that up. You can not convince me that you can read a man's whole inner nature from his footprint!"

Holmes chuckled.

"I hesitate to reveal my reasoning," he said, "for fear you will find it too elementary, as you have sometimes in the past. But since I know you will insist, I shall endeavor to oblige.

"We know that our man is tall and slender. From the circumstances of the crime we can deduce his intelligence, his ability at planning, and certainly a quality of emotionalism and recklessness.

"The rest — his temperament, ability at bridge, dislike of strong drink, tendency to insomnia, and other trivia — I have taken almost verbatim from those two excellent studies by Sheldon, VARIETIES OF HUMAN PHYSIQUE and VARIETIES OF TEMPERAMENT. There they are on my desk; I was studying them this morning.

"I saw you glance at them earlier, Watson. You should read them. Without going into detail, Shelden has found that all mankind falls into certain physical types and subtypes. Each type, he has ascertained, has corresponding and predictable temperamental and physiological attributes.

"In this instance, given what we can legitimately deduce about our quarry, we can then place him in the group which, Shelden has found, is liable to insomnia, to being upset by strong drink, and the rest. You see —— simplicity itself."

Holmes rose.

"Though Shakespeare antedated Sheldon by several centuries, Sheldon's conclusions were not unknown to him. He said quite accurately of

lean and hungry Cassius that 'such men are dangerous.' And in the immortal Hamlet he accurately depicted another murderer who certainly has a family resemblance to the one under our consideration.

"We seem to have used literary allusion liberally in describing him, have we not? Something of a Tarzan and something of a Hamlet —— a mixed personality! But such you will find him, I feel sure.

"Now you'll be wanting to get about your job, eh, Baynes? When Sheldon's work is more universally known, it will be necessary only to detail all the facts of a crime, feed them into a computor, and presto! an accurate description of the criminal will emerge. But for now the police must do some work themselves.

"So I won't keep you longer. Please let me know how you make out. I'll await the result with interest. And Watson, come again, do. Sooner this time, if your good wife will let you."

So we were dismissed. My last impression was of the tall, lean figure in the doorway, deep-set eyes glinting as one sinewy hand waved goodbye. Then the door closed and *The Adventure of the Single Footprint* was over.

Baynes was silent as we drove away from Glen Rest. My own comments drew forth only noncommital grunts until after we had reached my summer cottage and had opened two bottles of ale. Then Oliver Baynes settled back and regarded me moodily.

"'All I can tell you from this footprint,'" he misquoted, "'is that your killer is tall, thin, athletic, intelligent, emotional, has insomnia, doesn't like hard liquor, and plays a good game of bridge.'"

"You're not taking what Jack said seriously?"

"Of course I'm taking it seriously! It's right, every word of it!"

"But Jack's out of his mind!"

"So was Hamlet." Baynes downed his drink and looked at me curiously. "You mean that crack about a 'family resemblance' didn't register? Even though in Hamlet's family his uncle killed his father and Hamlet pretended insanity so he could kill his uncle?"

"What?" I gaped at him. "But — But —"

"Don't you see? *Jack killed Lawford Holmes.*"

Baynes poured himself another glass of ale, his good humor restored by my expression. "So you really thought we went there to cure him! Why, that was just a gag so you'd give a good performance. If you'd known the truth, you'd never have been able to hold it back. I wanted to see how much Jack would admit — and he knew it! So he admitted everything. Playing Sherlock Holmes to the hilt, he described himself by legitimate deduction so carefully that a moron couldn't miss it."

"Thanks!" I interjected, but the irony was wasted. Baynes went on.

"Finally, to rub it in, he added that business about Hamlet. To *me* he said that, with a straight face!"

"Then being crazy —?"

Baynes reached out and seized my Bartlett from the shelf.

"Shakespeare said it first. . . . Here we are. Hamlet, Act Two, Scene Two. 'Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.' I always thought the line went, 'There's a method in his madness.' ". . . You know, after I learned about him acting Sherlock as a boy, I had a funny feeling the whole thing was too pat. But if he had the doctors fooled, who was I to ask questions? I did keep an eye on him, but I couldn't figure out a reason."

"But Jack couldn't have done it! He's been locked up in Glen Rest for more than a year."

Baynes snorted and drank deep.

"That's what they think at Glen Rest," he retorted, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. "If he could get into Hilltop by swinging through the trees, he could get out of Glen Rest and back again the same way. Oh, the mechanics are easy enough.

"Last night he learned his uncle had stopped by on the way to Hilltop — maybe saw the car. During the night he stole out of the cottage, climbed a tree, swung over the wall, and was out. The railway goes right up the valley, past Hilltop. He simply swung onto a slow freight, dropped off at Hilltop, made his way to the top, and swung in through the trees by a route he already knew. Since he planned this so long ago, he had a gun hidden waiting for him — an unnumbered gun he could easily have smuggled out of the factory — and loaded with a bullet from the defective batch put out during the war.

"He slipped in and caught his uncle by surprise, held the gun on him while he took Lawford's own gun from the desk drawer. Then he handed his uncle the gun he'd brought and invited Lawford to take a shot at him."

"He did *what?*"

"He told us so. He said Lawford must have fired the gun, then thrown it when it didn't go off. How else could Lawford have got it if Jack didn't give it to him? You don't think Lawford Holmes kept handy a gun loaded with a bum bullet, do you?"

"But the bullet might have fired!"

"That was the chance Jack was taking. If the bullet went off, he got killed. If it didn't, he killed Lawford. As I see it, he was gambling that the bullet was as bad as the others that sent a lot of poor devils to their death. It was his way of dealing the cards out even, of letting Fate help judge his uncle.

"The gun jammed. Lawford threw it at him. Jack side-stepped and knocked his uncle out with a solar-plexus punch, which leaves no mark. Then he stage-managed the murder to make it look like suicide."

"Leaving the second gun to give him away?"

"It didn't give him away. It was the mark of vengeance accomplished — for his father and for others, his

buddies — the artistic touch that made it an execution and not a murder. The job finished, he caught another freight and was back in Glen Rest before daylight."

"And you knew all this when we went there?"

"Not all. I figured out that tree business for myself. But nobody could swing in through the trees at night unless he'd done it before and knew the way. That meant someone familiar with the grounds, somebody who'd climbed the trees. That seemed like a kid — or a kid who had grown up. Jack Holmes was the only one who fitted. As soon as I realized that, I could put most of the rest together. It didn't take any mastermind to figure out the details."

"The other boys on the case didn't figure it out."

"That still doesn't mean I'm a mastermind."

"When are you going to arrest him?"

"Arrest him?" Baynes looked at me pityingly. "In the first place, I can't prove a word of it. In the second, he has an alibi. He was locked up tight in an insane asylum. Do you suppose the asylum people would admit one of their patients could have been running around loose, committing murder? They'd swear on a stack of bibles it wasn't possible.

"And suppose I *could* prove everything? Jack's legally insane, attested so by three or four doctors. Would they admit they'd been fooled? Jack would just change asylums, that's all."

Baynes finished his glass, wiped away a mustache of suds, and reached for his hat.

"You mystery fellows write a lot about the perfect murder, but I bet you never ran across one like this before. As the killer, Jack committed a fool-proof murder. Then as the detective, he legitimately deduced himself guilty from a single footprint. We know he did it, why he did it, how he did it — and still we can't do a thing to him. He'll be 'cured' and become a big man some day. Maybe even governor. Wait and see."

Baynes jammed his hat down over his ears and stamped to the door.

"A family resemblance to Hamlet!" he was snorting, as the door closed behind him. "Blast his eyes! A *family* resemblance!"

I append a clipping from the Waterford *Press* of a month later:

GUN COMPANY HEIR
RETURNS TO HOME

John S. Holmes, who has been undergoing treatment for the after effects of a war wound, returned to his home at 123 Waverly Street yesterday.

A special meeting of the Board of Directors of the Holmes Gun and Iron Works, founded by Mr. Holmes's father, voted to place him at the head of the firm as president. The office has been vacant since the death of Lawford Holmes, Mr. Holmes's uncle, last month.

Mr. Holmes will enter upon his new duties at once.

SECOND PRIZE WINNER: Q. PATRICK

Q. Patrick is one of the three pseudonyms used by the well-known writing team of Hugh C. Wheeler and Richard W. Webb. By any other name their stories would smell as sweet. Messrs. Patrick have won a prize in every contest sponsored by EQMM, and it is our sincere hope that these eminent collaborators will continue to submit tales of crime and detection to all future renewals of our annual Prize Contest. . . . Here are the actual circumstances under which "Mother, May I Go Out To Swim?" came to be written. Visualize the Q. Patricks traveling in Mexico; visualize them riding a pair of cautious mules, arriving at an immense and formidable waterfall in the tropical countryside near Uruapan. They had just visited the nearby volcano of Paricutin and were still under the influence of the volcano's violent mood. Because of this, the waterfall seemed not a thing of beauty at all, but a particularly deadly manifestation of Nature. The Patricks could not help thinking: one little push and a person could be buried under tons of water. It was the ideal spot, they brooded, for an indecisive murderer to screw up his determination to the point of action, to go through with a killing which did not entail the actual handling of a weapon or that much more dangerous aftermath of murder, the disposal of the body.

Then, as always, the Q. Patricks shopped around in themselves, in their own minds, for a suitable villain. They selected various aspects of their own characters, blending them with a frustrated yearning for a more romantic life. This seemed a good start for a weak murderer, and further mulling evolved an ineffectual, "sensitive" male character. The romantic yearning took the form of a rather predatory Austrian girl. The old humdrum life revealed itself through a subtly dominating mother who, although a monster, possessed great charm and imparted to her weak son the assurance and self-confidence that he needed so desperately but had failed to build up for himself.

To make the background a more plausible one for such "refined" characters, the Patricks moved the waterfall from Mexico to Maine — a trivial engineering task, creatively speaking. And there was the skeleton, the framework, of Q. Patrick's story. To the skeleton they added flesh and a circulatory blood system; to the framework they added bricks and mortar.

So it gets down to this: the Q. Patricks don't know how other authors, alone or in combinations, get their basic ideas or develop their plots; the Patricks usually begin with a situation and then build the characters out of

themselves. After all, they maintain, there is enough variety in every individual's own character to create a score of villains and a dozen heroes (Editor's Note: Q. Patrick obviously believes that there is more villain in every single one of us than the stuff as heroes are made on). And the best part of it is, the Patricks conclude — no one's going to sue them!

The title chosen by Q. Patrick derives from a well-known quatrain that goes:

Mother, may I go out to swim?
Yes, my darling daughter:
Hang your clothes on a hickory limb
And don't go near the water.

The origin of this old piece of doggerel is dubious. The same cannot be said of the story you are about to read: its origin is now both clear and illuminating — which is all we started out to tell you.

MOTHER, MAY I GO OUT TO SWIM?

by Q. PATRICK

JOHN TUTHILL CRANE left the mild evening sunlight of the hotel terrace. He limped without definite purpose into the large room which the management called "The Recreation Hall." After five days of Maine vacation, he still felt bored and out of place. He should have cancelled the trip when, at the last moment, Bob's children had come down with measles and Clair had hurried off to Philadelphia to nurse them. But Clair had insisted that he go without her.

He could hear her soft, sweet laugh. "*Find yourself some pretty little girl. Play a bit. Perhaps we live too high in the clouds, you and I. After all, you're still just a boy.*"

He was still almost a boy. Thirty-six was not old. And yet why should youth have lower standards than maturity? What was there here for a civilized human being to play with — a dull beach, foolish old rocking ladies, loud young people beating tennis balls at each other. Tastelessness and boredom were triumphant.

He glanced quizzically around the empty hall with its massive Victorian furniture and its grand piano, bleak on a dais decorated with potted ferns. He thought how the cluttered gentility of it all would amuse Claire. *Exactly your Great Aunt Emily, my dear. Thank heavens, we've emancipated ourselves from New England.* The imagined phrases brought the quality of her voice close to him, light, delicately edged with laughter.

He walked to the piano and, drop-

ping his cane on the floor, sat down and started to play a delicious little piece of Milhaud which Claire had discovered at Boosey and Hawks. The contrast between the dry irony of the French music and the stodgy potted ferns around him was entertaining. But the joke lacked most of its zest because Claire wasn't there to share it.

To help the mood, he thought himself back to their music room in Worcester with Claire seated beside him, her chin cupped in her small, still exquisite hand, her shoulders sloping elegantly, her eyes, so swiftly blue, ready to throw back to him her appreciation of the jest.

And, as he played, his thoughts of Claire brought to his face an elusive resemblance to hers. It was a similarity of expression rather than of physical feature. For Mrs. Claire Crane was small and porcelain pretty, while her son was tall and handsome with only the slightest beginnings of plumpness and the faintest thinning of hair to mar the almost Byronic looks which went so well with the Byronic limp. But the resemblance to his mother was there, almost as if she were hiding inside him, peeping occasionally through his poet's eyes, smiling with his sensitive mouth.

John Tuthill Crane finished the Milhaud and began Claire's favorite Prokofieff Sonata. She especially admired his interpretation of it. He felt it was rather good himself.

A voice behind him suddenly said: "Please."

There was a certain impatience in the tone which startled him as much as the fact that there should be a voice at all to speak. He broke off in the middle of a measure and turned round on the stool.

A girl, unfamiliar to him, was standing on the dais. She was wearing a gaily embroidered Austrian dirndl which exposed rounded arms and a full square of suntanned throat. Her dark hair fell loose around an unusual face from which dark, almost oriental eyes watched him with an alertness that was disturbing.

"Why do you play Prokofieff like an old woman?" she asked in a voice that was faintly accented.

That abrupt question toppled John Tuthill Crane's poise. He was not used to criticism in the little circle of his initiate friends who treated Claire's musical Thursdays as the cultural high-point of the Worcester week.

The girl moved past him and sat down on the piano stool.

"I am a woman. I cannot help that. But . . ."

She began to play. The same Prokofieff sonata sounded very different. There was a crispness, a virility, an almost brutal candor. After a few pages, she stopped and swung round on the stool.

"You see? There is nothing cute in Prokofieff."

John Tuthill Crane's experience of girls had been almost as limited as his experience of criticism. Ever since the attack of polio which had left

him semi-invalid at the age of eighteen, his mother had carefully shielded him from dull contact with the boorish world outside their own beautifully simple drawing-room. The few carefully cultured daughters and nieces who had slipped, as it were, through the mesh of the net had almost all fallen meekly in love with his good looks and his talent and had served only to afford Claire and John with material for gay little private jokes when they were alone.

This girl, with her boldly carried neck and her Eastern eyes, challenging him as an equal, was something utterly new. The art connoisseur in him, trained by Claire in many prewar trips to Europe, reacted to a beauty that might have bloomed in a Tiepolo or, perhaps, in a Delacroix. But the beauty seemed too close, as if a figure in a canvas was leaning out of its frame, making some personal demand on him. Ill at ease, he murmured: "You play very well."

"No. I do not do anything very well." She reached in the pocket of her dirndl, brought out a package of cigarettes and lit one. The heavy-lidded eyes, still frankly curious, were on his face. "I've noticed you. You are by far the most interesting looking person in the hotel. What are you doing in a place like this?"

"I hardly know." John Tuthill Crane acknowledged the compliment with a faint bow. "I might ask you the same question."

"I have to be here. I work here. The gift shop in the lobby."

"Oh." The extra unfamiliarity of a girl who worked for her living added to his awkwardness. To bring the conversation back to something more accustomed and cosmopolitan, he said:

"You're not an American, are you?"

"Austrian. My mother and I got out of Vienna in 1938 when they killed my father. I was only a child then, of course. Mother's dead. That's why I'm working here." She was still watching him through cigarette smoke. "You're bored, aren't you?"

His laugh sounded weak, almost a giggle, to him. "I wouldn't call this place exactly stimulating."

"That's because you do what everyone else does. Go to the beach. That dull, dull beach. Sit on the terrace. You should go inland. Up the mountain. No one goes there. There is a waterfall. Do you know it? It's wonderful. A great sheet of water falling, falling, with little detailed ferns. It's like the Dolomites. No, more like Norway, like an illustration from Hans Christian Andersen."

Memories of pictures in the edition of Hans Christian Andersen read to him as a child by Claire rose in his mind. Fairy tale landscapes and, in front, disturbingly, some dark water nymph or some mysterious fatal queen.

She was saying: "I'll show it you. It's wonderful at night. There is a moon tonight. Shall we go after dinner? Around eight?"

Every night at eight-thirty, Claire

called from Philadelphia. It was the part of the day to which he looked forward most. Some strange quirk kept him from wanting the girl to know about Claire's call.

While he hesitated, she glanced quickly at his cane and began: "It's not very steep. I don't think . . ."

John Tuthill Crane flushed. "Thank you. But I'm not a cripple."

His friends never mentioned his limp. But this girl showed no embarrassment at his delicate reproach. "All right then? At eight?"

"I'm sorry. But I'm expecting an important call at eight-thirty and . . . "

"Then we'll make it later. Ten?" She got up from the piano stool, suddenly smiling. The smile brought an unaccountable thrill like the touch of a cold finger. "What's your room number?"

Some little voice in him said: *Don't tell.* How absurd. As if there was any reason to avoid taking a delightful moonlit walk to a beauty spot.

"Thirty-eight," he said.

"I'll come and get you. By the way, my name's Lotte — Lotte Rank."

She smiled again and left the Recreation Hall, the full skirt of the dirndl swinging around her sun-dark legs.

Claire seemed almost at his side. "*Get yourself a pretty little girl.*" When she'd said it, he had recognized the ironic timbre in her voice. She hadn't meant it, of course. It had been one of their subtle private jokes — a reminder of how completely self-sufficient they were, just the two of them.

John Tuthill Crane sat down again at the piano. His fingers stumbled as he tried a little Debussy.

He did not feel like playing.

She moved ahead of him up the mountain track. She was wearing white. In the clear moonlight her bare arms and legs, emerging from the shadowy whiteness, gleamed with a faint blue sheen. The other girls he had known would have chattered, half-nervous, half-coquettish. Lotte walked in silence, and her silence seemed part of the magic of the night which had brought John Crane an unwonted sensation of exhilaration. Almost forgetting his cane, he strode after her. Life seemed to have a new intensity of meaning, heady and rather alarming too.

Always ascending, they passed through a forest of milky black, fragrant evergreens. Gradually the silence became impregnated with a humming which, as they climbed, swelled to a roar. A sudden turn in the path revealed the waterfall.

In his peculiar mood, the scene before him had an unearthly beauty. They were standing on the brink of a chasm. Beyond the gorge, tumbling past nightblack crags, the white cascade roared down into a foam-swept pool perilously far below. Around it, smaller falls, thin and gentle as muslin, shimmered in the moonlight. The air was cool and wet with spray.

Lotte stood in front of him sil-

houetted against the galloping white water, something beautiful and strange from before history. He searched for poetic images. Thetis. A Norwegian witch girl. La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

Still without speaking, she took his hand and drew him down to a flat rock on the very edge of the sheer drop. Curling ferns sprouted around them. Their delicate fronds caressed John Tuthill Crane's legs. He let his cane fall, unnoticed.

When they had left the hotel, John had thought: *How Claire would love this*, but gradually, on their trip up the mountain, the image of his mother had faded to the gossamer thinness of a ghost. Now, suddenly, as his heart pounded to the beat of the waterfall, he thought: *This is too big for Claire. She'd be lost here away from her Derain sketches, her Queen Anne silver tea-set, her retinue.* It was the first consciously heretical thought he had ever had against his mother, and yet its enormity seemed quite natural.

Lotte had not removed her hand. At last her voice came, soft, foreign, framed in the ringing of the water.

"Who telephoned you tonight? Your wife?"

"No. I'm not married."

"A girl then?"

"No. It wasn't a girl either. It was my mother."

The admission came quite naturally too.

"Your mother? Why does she call? Someone is ill?"

"Oh, no. No reason. Mother calls me every night at eight-thirty. We're very close. We always have been."

As if she had challenged him, he felt an urgent need to explain to her his relationship with his mother, somehow to justify it. All his New England reserve, his training in cultured diffidence seemed to slip away. He was telling her of the trips to Europe which had begun after he had become well enough to travel, of Claire's wonderful feeling for Art which she had passed on to him, of the beautiful life she had built for the two of them in their own little world of paintings and music and books. And yet, as he talked, the picture he evoked did not seem quite the way he had expected it to seem. Something new was being released in him by the surge of the water, the moonlight, and this girl, something with the stature of a Man for which his former life seemed not the paradise he had thought it but a cage. "*Why do you play Prokofieff like an old woman?*" The remembered sentence was like a stab in his manhood.

When he finished, Lotte turned closer to him. In the moonlight her eyes were dark as the spray-wet rocks.

"She must be a remarkable woman, your mother."

The sarcasm in her voice neither escaped nor shocked him. "Oh, yes, she is."

"And rich too?"

He was startled by that crude question. "Rich? Why, do you . . . ?"

"You said your father left a great

deal of money. Did he leave it to you or to your mother?"

"To Claire — to mother, of course."

"I thought so." Her laugh was hard and bitter.

"Why are you laughing?"

"They need money to do it, women like that. How I loathe them, these evil, cannibal mothers who eat their young."

Suddenly her hands were on his arms. He saw her face, soft, dusky as a night flower, moving up to his. Then the image was obliterated as her lips found his mouth. She pressed herself against him. He could feel her heart pounding through her breast, infinitely strange and wonderful to him like the pounding of the cascade. His whole being seemed to rush to his lips and from them to hers. There was nothing left in him to protest against her terrible slander of Claire.

Her cheeks were wet with spray. He kissed them tempestuously. And as he kissed, her voice came in a near, warm whisper.

"I need you. I am so lonely. And you need me. You need a woman before it's too late."

The words meant nothing. He thought only of the breath from her lips on his cheek. Suddenly she drew away, leaving her hand curled in his.

"Come on. We will swim. There is a path down to the pool. It is cold but it fizzes like champagne."

She jumped up, releasing his hand. A shadow of the old John Tuthill Crane reasserted itself.

"Swim? But we have no suits!"

Her laughter was clear, exciting, unhuman as a water nymph's.

"Hang your clothes on a hickory limb."

She turned back to him, half-stooping over him so that her dark hair brushed his cheek.

"Come."

John leaped impetuously to his feet. He stumbled. He had to grope for his cane.

Lotte was disappearing into the shadows toward the path which wound down the chasm.

John Tuthill Crane limped after her, panting slightly.

Next morning John awoke to a feeling of shame, almost of panic. The sight of Claire's daily letter on the breakfast table was as welcome as a lifeline to a drowning sailor. He avidly consumed its usual quota of charming reflections, sly gossip, and warm intimacy. But a sensation of guilt, of betrayal, made a barrier. He avoided the Gift Shop and spent the whole day on the beach waiting, fanatically eager, for Claire's telephone call. That evening, when it came and he heard his mother's gay, bantering voice, it was like returning home from a perilous voyage. His protestations of loneliness were so wistful that she gave her soft crooning laugh.

"My poor baby, you really are sad. How tiresome of these wretched infants to contract such a silly disease."

"I could join you in Philadelphia," he suggested impulsively.

"Now, darling, be sensible. You know you never had measles. What would we do with a measly Lord Byron?"

Claire rang off. As John put down the receiver, there was a tap on the unlocked door and Lotte came in. She glanced from the telephone to him. At the sight of her, he felt his knees go weak. She moved to him without speaking. She slipped her arms, cool and soft, around him.

"Johnny, all day I have been in a dream, waiting."

Her lips came up to his, sure of themselves, possessive. With their touch, John Tuthill Crane forgot his pitiful need for Claire. He was taller, stronger, swaggeringly capable of anything.

"The waterfall again, Johnny?"

"Yes, Lotte."

From a great height, he looked down with contemptuous distaste at the little male spinster who had been chattering over the phone with its mother.

His mouth moved to kiss Lotte's open eyes. The thick lashes stirred against his lips.

And then I closed her wild, wild eyes with kisses four. . . .

After that evening he always called her in his mind La Belle Dame Sans Merci. Not because her enchantment was evil. But because it was sheer, delirious enchantment. Every night they would go to the waterfall. Sometimes they would sit together on the brink of the chasm in enraptured silence. Sometimes Lotte reluctantly would talk of the hardship, the bitterness, the loneliness of her life before she met him. During the day, when Lotte could leave her work, they went horseback riding or swimming in the ocean. Claire had always zealously guarded the invalid in him. With Lotte he found he thrived on exercise. Lotte had a phonograph in her little room. Some afternoons they would sit together listening to Landowska play *The Goldberg Variations* or Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire.* With Lotte, even music seemed new and wonderful.

It was as if a poison he had never detected was being drawn out of his veins. And every day, he realized more clearly the sterile perversity of his former life with Claire. Although Lotte never again mentioned his mother's name, he looked back on her with different eyes and saw behind the porcelain smile, the little fluttering caresses, to the true woman. The cannibal mother who had been trying to eat her young. The Enemy. That was what she had always been — The Enemy.

But something — either cowardice or a vestige of loyalty — kept him writing to his mother every day and brought him to his room punctually at eight-thirty to await her call. Sometimes, when he chattered with her over the phone and he heard the same old tenderness in his own voice, he was appalled at his deception.

The moment he was back with Lotte, however, nothing seemed to

matter. Lotte was hungry for him. There was a force, a flame in her that almost consumed him. His soul and body knew heights of whose existence he had never dreamed before he met her. Sometimes he felt that his frame was too fragile to endure such ecstasy. But, if there were fleeting moments when he regretted the small tranquility of his life in Worcester, he was not afraid of them, for he realized that it was not Johnny Crane who was experiencing them. It was The Victim — the little male spinster. . . .

One evening, about a week after they had met, they took a picnic supper up the mountain and ate together while the light faded over the foaming cascade. Lotte was gay, wild. Exalted by her wayward lovemaking, John Tuthill Crane forgot the time. When he happened to glance at his watch, it was ten minutes past eight. A pang of conscience caught him.

"I'd better get right back or I'll miss Mother's call."

"No!" Lotte swung round, her eyes blazing with an intensity that startled him. "No," she shouted. "Damn her. No."

She flung herself into his arms, kissing his cheek, his mouth, his eyes. "Stay with me, Johnny. Stay with me. Don't let her spoil it. Don't, Johnny."

Philadelphia seemed suddenly further away than The Great Bear.

When they returned, about two o'clock, to the hotel, Lotte came with him to his room. They had hardly entered when the phone rang. A chill shivered through John Tuthill Crane.

"Mother."

"Don't answer. Don't answer."

The phone rang again. John's hand hovered and then picked up the receiver. The operator's voice was followed by Claire's.

"John, my dear, my darling, is it you?"

He was surprised at the sound of her voice. It was hoarse with a quivering intensity that somehow brought memories of Lotte's voice.

"Yes, Claire."

"My darling, what happened? I've been terrified, terrified. An accident? Oh, John, don't tell me you're hurt."

John Tuthill Crane felt himself dwindling in size. With a feeble attempt to be both conciliatory and casual, he said: "I'm sorry, Claire. You see, there was a picnic and . . ."

"Picnic!" His mother's voice rose in shrill, throbbing anger. "You torment me for hours. You stay out until two o'clock in the morning for a picnic."

"But, Claire . . ."

Her laughter tilted dangerously upward. "I was calling to let you know I would be able to get home in four days. I thought it would please you. But now, apparently, that you've discovered the exquisite pleasure of picnics, you won't want to return."

"But, Claire, please listen. . . ."

"Listen? I cannot imagine there is anything interesting for me to listen to. Nor can I see any particular reason for calling again. You know my num-

ber. If you need anything. Money, for example . . ."

"Mother."

He heard the receiver clatter on its stand. It was the first time he had ever quarreled with Claire and the shocking ferocity of it horrified him. It was the first time too that she had stripped off pretense and shown herself to him nakedly covetous and hungry, the Cannibal Mother. An obscene picture came of a praying mantis, green jaws above little withered insect paws.

Suddenly Lotte's hands were on his arms. Beneath the swinging hair, her eyes were fixed implacably on his.

"I heard. It's a bondage. Don't you see? A bondage not of your own choosing."

He gave a weak shrug.

"Johnny." She shook his arms roughly. "Johnny, love me, marry me."

But his manhood had left him. With dreadful clarity, he saw now the picture of himself as he really was. You can't sweep away the past overnight. He was thirty-six. It was only Claire who called him a boy. For thirty-six years the poison had been at work. He was crippled not only in body. He whispered: "She'd never let me."

Her hands slid up to his shoulders. "What difference does that make, Johnny? What difference?"

"You know. I have no money. She'd never give me a penny. I don't know anything useful. My piano, sketching. I've never been trained to work."

"But you could, Johnny. You could."

She was kissing him, but the warm, clinging kisses did not seem to be for him. They were for someone else who didn't exist, for Johnny Crane, not for the little male spinster.

"If only she were dead." The words came, wrenched from her, close to his ear. "If only she were dead."

Claire did not call for two days. Nor did John call her. He was constantly with Lotte and constantly she was urging him to marry her. She had a determination, an unquenchable desire to keep what she had which possibly only a European refugee suckled on horror and lawlessness could possess. It was so powerful that sometimes he could almost believe in the picture she painted, the two of them buoyed up by love successfully fighting a hostile world together. Once, at her insistence, he began a letter to Claire, trying to explain. But his pen could hardly move. He was a coward. He knew it and the knowledge paralyzed him. Through Lotte's eyes, he could see now how deftly in the past Claire had laughed and charmed him away from all the other girls. He was frightened of her. A little worm was in him. He was deathly afraid of an existence without her financial security.

During these days Lotte's lovemaking was even more torrid. He submitted to it with abandon, its bitter-sweetness heightened by the realization that somehow it must

come to an end. He felt exaltation but near-panic too. There was nothing certain any more, nothing to cling to.

On the third evening, just before he was to go to the waterfall with Lotte, a telegram came for John Tuthill Crane. His fingers shook as he picked it up. He did not have the courage to open it, to face the inevitable. He slipped it into his pocket.

But up at the waterfall, in the place which was so completely associated with his love for Lotte, a strange peace descended on him. As Lotte lay, quiet, with her head on his lap, he took the telegram out of his pocket. She twisted up, snatched it from him, and was going to tear it into pieces. Then she changed her mind. She slit the envelope. In the bright moonlight, he could see her, curiously hunched forward, trying to make out the words.

She handed him the sheet of paper. He lit his cigarette lighter. He read:

AM SO WORRIED, DARLING. FORGIVE YOUR SILLY CLAIRE. ARRIVING TOMORROW ON SEVEN O'CLOCK TRAIN.

From the telegram his glance moved to Lotte. She was sitting close to him and her dark eyes were gleaming with a wild, unworldly brightness that sent a shiver through him.

"If she came here to see the waterfall." Lotte's white hand pointed down, down the chasm at their side. "If she came here and fell. . . ."

A moment of terror came to John Tuthill Crane. Then, astonishingly, it went and something else took its place. A dizzy excitement, a sudden, frighteningly violent desire for release. He leaned forward and kissed her. He seemed a giant in size.

He said nothing, but the seed was sown. It would grow.

That night, on their return, Johnny Crane went first to Lotte's room. They lay quietly, clinging together like two children. They hardly spoke. It was as if their bodies were in such a communion that they could converse without words. But, finally, in the soft darkness, the words were spoken. Johnny heard Lotte's voice almost as if it were in his own mind.

"You'll take her to the waterfall. I'll be there as a witness. Or you can be the witness and I'll. . . ."

Mrs. Claire Crane moved up the hotel steps, her gloved hand lying lightly on her son's arm. John had never seen her more exquisitely turned out. Her lavender dress and big hat, both deliberately unyouthful, completed a portrait delicate as a Gainsborough. In the taxi from the station, she had been all charm, amusing him with anecdotes of his nephew's measles, commenting wittily on the new Cyril Connolly book she had with her. There was not the faintest trace of the neurotic virago who had babbled over the telephone.

Thrilling inwardly to his purpose, John slipped into a pretense of his mother's mood with an ease that astonished him.

When she saw the Recreation Hall, Mrs. Crane gave her little silvery laugh. "My dear, how exactly like your Great Aunt Emily." John Tuthill Crane smiled. He had anticipated the remark.

He had arranged with Lotte that she should sit at the table next to theirs at dinner. She was already there when he led his mother into the dining-room. It was simple, after they had settled themselves, to make a casual-seeming introduction.

Mrs. Claire Crane smiled sweetly, but the keen scrutiny from her clear blue eyes did not escape John.

"Delighted," she murmured. "How nice to know that John has found pleasant acquaintances. I was so afraid he would be bored."

Ever since a pre-war trip to Spain, Claire had adopted the Spanish habit of taking a "digestive" stroll after a meal. There was no difficulty in bringing the conversation around to the waterfall. As arranged, it was Lotte who said:

"You should take your mother up to see it by moonlight, Johnny."

"A waterfall by moonlight. How delicious." Mrs. Crane put her hand over John's. "Of course we must go — Johnny." She smiled at Lotte. "And you must come too."

Unexpected panic seized John. He found himself stammering: "It's rather steep, Mother. Up the mountain. I . . ."

"Darling, I'm not quite that decrepit yet." Mrs. Crane tapped his cheek and turned again to Lotte. "It's terrible the way he coddles me. I'm always telling him he's too fond of me and that he should marry. He has such charming girl friends in Worcester. But he's foolish. He's determined not to marry until he can support a wife. As if it mattered whether the money was mine or his."

That attack, delivered in the gentlest voice, not only told him that his mother had already sensed a rival in Lotte. It gave him a queer thrill that two women should be fighting over him. It also dispelled his moment of uncertainty and fear.

"All right, Claire," he said almost nonchalantly. "After coffee, we'll go up to the cascade."

The roar of the cataract sounded through the night. Lotte was a little ahead. Mrs. Crane kept her hand on John's arm. He felt she was supporting him rather than needing support herself. For the first time in several days, he was reminded of his lameness.

They turned the bend and the cascade foamed and swirled in front of them. Lotte had moved through the curling ferns to the very brink of the chasm. Mrs. Crane left John's side, clapping her hands in delight.

"How ravishing." Her laugh trilled out. "I'm sure this is the site you've been choosing for your little picnics, John."

She moved to Lotte's side on the extreme edge of the precipice. John heard her voice, sparkling as an unsheathed sword.

"What a charming place for dream-

ing, dear. I always think the summer's the time for day-dreams, don't you? Little relationships, pretty, ephemeral as butterflies."

They were both on the brink. This was the moment. Leaning on his cane, John Tuthill Crane started to move toward the two women. He could see his mother's slight, graceful back. In the moonlight she seemed hardly more than a girl.

The surge of the water pulsed like the coursing of his own blood. With sudden, gruelling vividness, the realization came of all he was going to lose. As if it was he who was going to drown, his past life, tantalizingly, spuriously golden, paraded before him. Then the image of Lotte rose up, beautiful, voluptuous, the symbol of all that was passionate, enchanting, real. La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

He was so close to his mother he could smell her perfume. Parma Violet. Its familiar fragrance seemed distilled from the very essence of his pretty little sham life in Worcester. A desperate desire for release from the bondage that was not his chosen bondage gave him courage. He dropped his cane. Both his hands went out. He pushed with all his strength.

There was a shrill, thin scream. For a moment it seemed to him the only sound in the world. Then it was lost in the roar of the water.

John Tuthill Crane sat on the bed in his hotel room. He felt delightfully calm. Now that the inquest was over and the verdict of accidental death given, it seemed impossible that there could ever have been that confusion of doubt and fear in him. He was purged now forever of the lethal poison which had infected his blood. He had won the most crucial battle of his life by courage and clearsightedness. He had known what he wanted — and he had it.

Her voice came to him, part of the new peace. "Poor darling, it must have been an ordeal for you. You were wonderful at the inquest."

Yes, thought John Tuthill Crane, not modestly, he had been rather wonderful.

"You were fond of her, weren't you?"

"I suppose I thought I was."

"I'll make it up to you, dear. Don't worry."

"I know you will."

"Such a dreadful accident, slipping like that. Dear, this may be the wrong time to say it, but I think it was just as well — for you, I mean."

Just as well.

"She wasn't right for you. I could tell immediately. She wasn't quite — well, quite a lady. The possessive type, too. She'd have swallowed you up like a cannibal, dear."

John Tuthill Crane shivered in memory of those exhausting peaks of passion and smiled across the room at the only woman he would ever love.

"Yes, mother," he said.

On the occasion of Cleek's first appearance in EQMM we decided on a bold stroke. For a long time we had known that John Dickson Carr had never quite lost his affection for the chronicles of Cleek. So we asked our good friend John to write a paragraph or two introducing the Man of the Forty Faces. Needless to warn you, John Dickson Carr hit the homicidal hammer on the head: in ten sentences he assessed the Cleekian stature with uncanny accuracy. Here is what John said:

"Nobody could pretend that the stories about Hamilton Cleek are masterpieces, because the Hanshews [Thomas W. and Mary E.] were not gifted with a fortunate literary style. Their stories are funny in the wrong places; they ooze sentimentality; they wallow in every error known to detective fiction. And yet, if you told me a new Cleek story had been discovered, I would rather read that story than any discovery except a new story about Father Brown.

"And the reason? Almost every Cleek story contains a new — and usually spectacular or apparently supernatural — method of committing murder. Men walk into rooms and vanish, or die without discernible cause. The nine-fingered skeleton, the empty hypodermic, the monster footprint by the tower: such conceptions have real imagination. The Hanshews used ideas. They spun plots. And, in a day when so many writers try to substitute half-baked psychology for honest ingenuity, we need a reminder that the plot is the story."

Well, we cannot give you, in the true sense of the phrase, a newly discovered Cleek story — but we can give you the next best thing. "Murder in an Empty House" is a slightly condensed version of Chapters Nine, Ten, and Eleven of CLEEK'S GOVERNMENT CASES *(published in England as* CLEEK'S GREATEST RIDDLES*). Because this short story was embedded in a Cleek book that has always been published as a full-length novel, you may have missed it. If you did, and if you too confess to a lingering affection for the Vanishing Cracksman, here is a Cleek story that to all intents and purposes is a "discovery."*

MURDER IN AN EMPTY HOUSE

by THOMAS W. HANSHEW

SUPERINTENDENT NARKOM of Scotland Yard had reached a state bordering upon insanity, for that worthy gentleman was now involved in unraveling a series of mysterious occurrences which threatened to out-

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wit him by their very cunning. In spite of the fact that his thermometer was registering eighty degrees in the shade, and that his forehead was literally streaming with perspiration, the Superintendent paced the floor of his private office in Scotland Yard in a state of keen excitement. As Big Ben's last, sonorous note of twelve came over the intervening distance, he whipped round at the opening of the door behind him and nodded curtly to Detective-sergeant Hammond, who stood in the frame of the open doorway.

"Well!" rapped out the Superintendent in a fury of impatience. "It was only a petty gas explosion, wasn't it? Speak up, man! It's not another bomb mystery?"

Detective-sergeant Hammond shook his head.

"I'm afraid it is, sir," said he gravely. "That's the fourth time this month there's been an explosion at that house in Harebourn Square, and this time is worst of all, for the house has been empty since the last explosion, when those French people rented it and soon afterward moved away. There's not a stick or shred of furniture in the place, no gas or light laid on. What the Count wanted to go there for at all beats me."

"So it does me," fumed the Superintendent, mopping his bald patch desperately. "There's only one explanation, of course. But there, what's the use of talking! He was killed directly he entered the front room, you say?"

"Yes, sir. He had reached the middle of the room, when there came a flash, and he was killed at once, as if a bomb had struck him on the head. Nothing passed through the air, shot or bomb — that we can both swear to. I can't believe there was any bomb hidden in that room, because the officer on point duty went over it only the preceding day. The agent happened to be passing, and they got talking about the house; the agent, Metting & Vell's young man, whipped out his key and they went into the very room, sir. The sergeant says it's all covered with linoleum, the people never took it up. That's all I can make of it, sir. Shall I tell Lennard to bring round the limousine, sir?"

"Confound the limousine!" cried Mr. Narkom, excitedly hitting his hands together. "It's Mr. Cleek I want, Hammond; and what the deuce has become of him Heaven alone knows! I've rung and rung that blessed telephone till I shouldn't wonder if the exchange refused to give another reply. And now I've sent Lennard round after him. Ah!" as the sound of footsteps rang in the stone corridor, "that is Lennard now. Found him, my lad?"

Lennard's hand went up to his forehead in grave salute, but his face wore a worried, anxious look.

"No, sir," said he. "I drove down to Clarges Street with Inspector Petrie, made up as yourself, to see why no one was answering your 'phone; but all I could learn from the charwoman was that the gentleman

and young Dollops went off to Hampstead Heath this morning, and they haven't got back yet."

"Hampstead Heath be jiggered!" said Mr. Narkom with an irritability born of long suspense. "That means he has gone out for the day. Think of it! Playing round Hampstead Heath, with the law waiting, and a case like this in hand! Cinnamon! but it's enough to send a man crazy to think of it!

"Meanwhile, I am here, prevented from going home till goodness knows what hour tonight; and I promised Mrs. Narkom to take her to a theatre, too! Two stalls wasted, to say nothing of a good dinner! And the only man capable of handling this diabolical case, capable of getting to the bottom ——"

He stopped short, and sucked in his breath as the sharp, insistent ring of the telephone bell caused him to fairly jump and fling himself across the room. And the softly whistled strains of the opening bars of "God Save the King" sent him into a very transport of delight.

"That you, old chap!" he half-laughed, half-cried, as he recognized the sound. "Thank Heaven you have got back at last! I've had a nice old fright, I can tell you. We're in a dreadful hole. What? Yes, fearful. What's that? You'll meet me? Oh, good man! Good man! You'll have a laurel wreath for this, I swear! Goodbye."

Still in a state of excitement that went ill with the heat of the day, the Superintendent plunged across the room, dragged on his coat, seized his hat, and went down and out into the street, where Lennard and the limousine awaited him.

"Mr. Cleek's meeting us at Oxford Circus, corner of Portland Street, Lennard. Right-hand side. Just a minute."

He scribbled a hasty message to leave for Petrie when that worthy should return, jumped into the throbbing car, banged the door after him, and off they went dashing up Parliament Street, along Cockspur Street, pell-mell to the Haymarket and the meeting-place, at a speed that set the constables on point duty winking in astonishment. It still lacked five minutes of being a quarter after twelve when the limousine whizzed up to Portland Street; and there was Cleek, immaculately attired, waiting.

"All right, Lennard. Give her her head, lad, and make for wherever you're bound," Cleek said cheerfully, as he flashed into the limousine and closed the door. Even as he dropped into his seat the car wheeled round and with a final scrunch rocketed away into the shining roadway.

"Well, here I am, you old fidget. Sorry I wasn't 'on tap' the minute you rang. Didn't get back to my diggings until ten minutes ago."

"Oh, yes, I know. Lennard told me. Been traipsing round Hampstead Heath, and a day like this, too!"

"Dollops and I had an adventure, and that delayed us. I came across a poor devil of a fellow on the Heath. He'd evidently been knocked down

and injured about the head; but all he could do was to writhe and twist about, his brain too badly injured to give any account of himself, or what had happened. And so, naturally, we had to stop."

"Oh, yes, you would! Just the sort of silly, sentimental thing you would do!" interposed the Superintendent, for once in his life rendered irritable with his soul's idol, which was hardly to be wondered at, for the day had been one of strange happenings. The integrity and the efficacy of his beloved Yard were at stake, and the Superintendent was almost beside himself.

"You might have been blown up with a bomb or knifed, but that didn't matter, I suppose, as long as you could fuss over someone else. Besides, I've got trouble enough at Hampstead as it is."

"Hallo! Hallo!" laughed Cleek, turning amused eyes on the heated face of his friend. "What's rubbed your feathers the wrong way, my friend? As Dollops would say, 'You've got the fair old 'ump,' I can see. Just because I wasn't on hand directly you rang for me, like a well-behaved parlormaid, and spent an hour looking after a poor devil of an injured chap."

The Superintendent fairly snorted in his rage and relief.

"Oh, hang the man!" he flung out, half laughingly. "I don't care a jot about him. But don't mind me today. I'm nearly crazy with anxiety. And to think I needed you so but couldn't get at you because of some petty tramp or other! Don't talk about it; I can't think of anything but this infernal mystery. To think that a man can be murdered in a perfectly empty house, an absolutely empty room, right under the telescopes of two of our own men told off to watch him, and who have no more idea than Queen Anne how it was done; and in addition to that, complete plans of fortifications destroyed worth a fortune."

Cleek sat up suddenly and threw out his chin.

"Hallo! that sounds interesting," said he with a flicker of the eyebrows. "An empty house, eh? Whereabouts, pray?"

"In Harebourn Square, Hampstead, strangely enough. Why, what on earth ——"

For Cleek drew himself up suddenly, his brows puckered, and his face very grave.

"A queer coincidence," he muttered. "But let's have the details of the case. When and where and how did the affair begin?"

"Yesterday, at least as far as I personally am concerned," replied the Superintendent. "It was somewhere about ten o'clock yesterday morning when I had a special message from the War Office that they were sending someone to whom I was to pay special attention — no less a personage than the Alterian Ambassador, Count Estamar, I daresay you have heard of him, Cleek?"

"I have, as it happens," admitted that gentleman with a faint smile. "I

believe, in his younger days, he was attached to the Alterian consulate, and represented the Ambassador at several State functions. He came over here for the Coronation; then, later, he was made Ambassador here. Surely he has not been getting into any trouble over secret papers. He is too honorable a man for any proceedings of that sort, although I believe he is not half so wealthy as he ought to be."

The Superintendent shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, he wasn't soliciting the Yard's aid on his own account, old chap, but for his son, Count Egon Estamar, a young man of about twenty-five. That's where the trouble lies, and ——"

But Cleek struck in upon him suddenly.

"Don't tell me anything has happened to that bonny boy," he interposed with a little, anxious sigh. "I remember him well by name. Supposed to be the handsomest, bravest chap that ever donned the Emperor's uniform or spoke the Alterian tongue. Engaged to be married, too, to Adela von Altburg, his cousin, and countess in her own right. It's not that boy who has been hurt?"

"But it is," said the Superintendent sadly. "He was killed little more than an hour ago."

"Killed!" Cleek hunched up his shoulders and gave vent to a little clicking sound; then: "Go on. What did Count Estamar want with you?" he said in a quiet voice.

"He wanted police protection for his son as far as Dover on his way to Paris."

"Police protection?" rapped out Cleek, with an inquiring rise of his eyebrows. "In Heaven's name, what for? He wasn't in any danger, was he? Or was he carrying special papers?"

"That's just it, Cleek; he was carrying the original text of several secret treaties and fortifications. The Alterian Government had been having them drawn up here in the consulate, and Count Estamar, the father, had a lively dread lest the nature of the contents should have leaked out and an attack be made upon the young man."

"One moment, please. Did anyone know that these treaties were being copied? Any of the clerks or attachés aware that he was going to make that journey?"

"Only one, his secretary, Fritz Tarleschen, a young man absolutely devoted to the family and equally incapable of betraying his master, even if he were ungrateful enough."

"Why ungrateful?" asked Cleek quickly.

"Because he owes his life to young Count Egon. He had fallen overboard from a pleasure yacht and Count Egon jumped in after him and rescued him. But the immersion had injured his throat, and he was rendered incapable of speech. He acted, however, as a sort of combination secretary and companion to Count Egon."

"A bonny boy, indeed!" said Cleek with an approving nod of the head.

"It isn't every man who risks his own life for a total stranger like that. Well, go on. It doesn't seem as if anything could leak out if he were unimpeachable."

"Oh, yes; they are sure of him. It was Fritz Tarleschen who copied the treaties and prepared the plans, and got them ready for his young master to take to Dover this morning by the 11:40 from Victoria. And so — I say, what the dickens are you muttering about? I don't believe you're listening."

Cleek gave a dry little smile and jerked up his head.

"Oh, yes, I am, Mr. Narkom," said he serenely. "But that name — Tarleschen — h'm! Tarleschen; it sounds familiar. Where the deuce have I heard it before?" He pinched up his chin reflectively. "Well, go on. Then what happened?"

"Well, when they were ready, Count Estamar came down to me privately and asked me to appoint two plainclothes men to watch over his son from the time he left the Alterian consulate, here, at eleven o'clock, until he reached Dover, where the papers were to be handed over to another envoy. The Count thought that he could trust these valuable papers to no one better than his own son."

"Certainly; but if he was so afraid of an attempt being made on them, why didn't he go himself, instead of sending the boy?"

Mr. Narkom frowned.

"Yes," he agreed musingly; "I thought of that myself. But his reasons were quite natural ones. He was undergoing a severe attack of gout, and as a matter of fact, had to be lifted in and out of his carriage to come in to me."

"Rather a wonder he didn't send for you to come to the consulate, wasn't it?"

"No. He didn't want his son to know that he had invoked the aid of the police, so ——"

"Oho!" said Cleek, with a strong rising inflection. "So the young man didn't know he was being watched over, eh? And whom did you entrust with that peculiar duty, Mr. Narkom?"

"Petrie and Hammond."

"H'm! They're trustworthy enough, if not particularly brainy. I should have thought there wouldn't be much chance of 'spoofing' them, as the saying is. But you never know, as the old maid said when the young man winked at her."

"Well, it seems, as far as I can make out," went on Mr. Narkom gravely, "that young Estamar came out of the consulate after receiving the papers, and had a taxicab summoned and directed to Victoria in order to catch the 11:40 Dover express. Our men followed at a discreet distance. When he reached Grosvenor Road, however, he evidently gave fresh directions to the driver, and off he went to this empty house in Harebourn Square. The next thing he was blown to pieces before the very eyes of Petrie and Hammond. No sight or sound of a bomb or shot; not a soul in sight but the

two police officers; the house and room empty, as they could see by their glasses. And there's the whole case in a nutshell. What do you make of it, old chap?"

"H'm!" said Cleek. "A remarkably thick shell to crack — that's what *I* make of it. And what has been done so far?"

"Nothing," admitted the Superintendent, somewhat apologetically. "I had to communicate with Count Estamar, who is almost crazed with grief; he has had the body identified and removed by special permission to his own house, and ——"

"I presume you are taking me there now. Is that so?" struck in Cleek with a smile.

Mr. Narkom fidgeted with his watch chain.

"Well, yes," he admitted. "Count Estamar asked if Mr. Cleek could be induced to take the case. Sir Henry Wilding had told him about you. So I said I would do my best, and see if you would."

Cleek paused a moment and sat studying the distance through the square of window, with a ridge between his brows. Finally:

"Oh, well!" said he in an even tone. "I've a fancy to be out of town myself, so you might put Lieutenant Deland on the job this time; and, with your permission, as you've literally kidnaped me, I'll use your locker, and fix that gentleman up. Tell Lennard to drive round through the park to Curzon Street; that is, unless you are going to the consulate? No? Well, all right, then." And while Mr. Narkom gave the necessary instructions, his famous ally pulled down the blinds, whipped open that useful receptacle, and was soon busy in transforming himself into the smart young army officer who belonged to a regiment that never existed.

"Here we are at last," said Mr. Narkom, as the limousine drew up in front of a house in Curzon Street, which house agents would fitly describe as "a palatial residence." This was the Count Estamar's town house, but it presented a funereal appearance, with its closely drawn blinds and dark, wooden shutters.

The Superintendent jumped out of the limousine, and with Cleek at his heels went clattering up the wide stone steps to the great front door. Two minutes later they were ushered into the presence of Count Friedrich Estamar himself.

There are few sadder sights than a grief-stricken parent, and as Cleek looked on the haggard, despairing face and silver hair, his heart beat in sympathy. A mist swam up in front of his eyes for an instant, blotting out everything but this sad, sorrowing old man.

Then Count Estamar fairly leaped forward and threw himself upon Cleek.

"Thank Heaven you have come so swiftly. But, alas! it is too late," he said in a low, broken voice. "I cannot realize it yet. Forgive my grief, Lieutenant — Lieutenant Deland, I think you said, Mr. Narkom? It has all

happened so suddenly, the full horror of it is hardly believable. He was my only son, my bonny boy. So brave, so true, and now this — this would make it appear that he was a traitor to his country, a traitor to me, who trusted him with something dearer to me than my life — my honor. Oh, it is terrible, awful!"

Cleek let his eyes rest upon the stricken man with an infinite pity in their depths. But he said nothing. And finally the Count continued:

"Only the preceding night he swore to die sooner than let any harm come to his charge — only the preceding night."

"He may have been lured there," Cleek said gently, and even as he spoke came a sound which made him switch round on his heel, the sound of a woman's laugh, short and sharp and hard, which grated horribly upon his ears.

He turned to look into the eyes of a girl, sweet-faced and smiling, like a young lily sprung up suddenly in the darkness of the sombre room.

She was standing between the crimson plush curtains that screened off one room from the other, and it was evident that she had heard Cleek's remark. He did not need the introduction to tell him that this was Adela, Countess von Altburg, nor did he need a keen eye to detect that she was suffering not only the pangs of grief but of wounded love as well.

"Lured there, you said, Lieutenant Deland?" she reiterated, when they had seated themselves. "Then why did he have a key handy, and why was he talking so earnestly to a woman, promising to meet her at that same house only this very morning, so engrossed that he never heard me call to him? He had locked himself in the study here so that he should not be disturbed. Lured, indeed! Oh, no; there is no help for it. He was a traitor, a traitor to his country and to *me*, and he deserved his fate. But he did not get the papers; at least, I saved our country from *that*."

The old Count sprang to his feet suddenly and seized her arm.

"But he did, Adela!" cried he in a strangely blurred, forsaken voice. "My God! child, why did you let him leave the house at all? Why did you permit this dishonor to fall upon us, if you *knew*?"

She looked at him for a moment with horror-stricken eyes.

"What do you mean, Uncle Friedrich?" she said swiftly. "Egon didn't have them then, he said so; I heard him with my own ears, and I nearly went mad. But directly he had gone I flew to the 'phone and told you, begging you to hold the package over, and you promised me you would. That is why I never thought of them till now."

"But I wasn't there," broke in the Count disjointedly. "I had a message from the War Office and went across there, unwillingly enough, for my gout had been giving me a bad half-hour. So I locked up the papers in the safe and locked up my office as well, and went over, to find out afterward

that a mistake had been made. When I got back, I found my son had come and gone again, taking the papers with him."

Cleek lifted a silencing hand.

"How could he do that," he said quietly, in his smooth, even tones, "if you had locked up the safe yourself, Count? Had he a duplicate key?"

"Yes. I told you I had trusted my son with something dearer than life. That was it. He possessed duplicate keys to everything that I had that was of value."

"I see, I see."

Cleek stood a moment, pinching his chin reflectively. Then he switched round upon the Countess.

"The woman?" he said serenely. "I suppose you do not know her name?"

"As it happens, I do," threw in the Countess with a fierce little laugh. "Oh, I know it was hardly honorable, but I listened; you see, I loved him better than life itself, and when I heard him speak to her in endearing terms, I think my heart stopped beating. I could have killed her with my bare hands, that cat of a Frenchwoman. I ——" Her voice trailed off into silence, for of a sudden Cleek's head went up and a queer light shone in his eyes.

"Tell me her name," he said quietly, his eyes upon her face.

"He called her Margot. I do not know what the last name is."

"*Margot!*"

The word sprang involuntarily from Cleek's lips. Mr. Narkom echoed it blankly.

Then the Countess gave a little sharp, intaken breath.

"You know her, too!" she said with some suspicion in her voice. "Who is she? What is she?"

"Head of the worst gang of Continental spies in existence," gave back Cleek grimly. "That's who she is — the devil! And if that poor boy got into her cursed clutches ——"

He stopped suddenly and let the rest of the sentence go by default. For the Count, with a little groan, had sunk back into his chair and covered his face with his shaking hands.

"That accounts for the delay in getting through to you on the telephone," cried the Countess in a very frenzy of despair. "It must have been quite ten minutes before you answered me ——"

"Ample time for Egon to have got round there and imitated my voice," said the Count in a hushed voice. "My God! I would rather have died before this came to me; rather have died than that he, my son, should have proved himself a traitor."

Cleek waited a moment and then threw in a quick question.

"What country are these treaties affecting, Count Estamar? Or can't you tell me?" he said quietly.

"A little kingdom called Mauravania. It is combining with Italy against us, and I am not betraying any State secret in telling you that if Italy could have destroyed those papers, so as to leave no trace behind, they would have paid untold gold. They want further time, and the loss

of these papers means that they have got it. But what has that to do with my son?"

"Nothing, save that it might be that Power behind Margot," said Cleek. "But we shall see. Meanwhile, Mr. Narkom has told me about your son's companion, Mr. Tarleschen. Might I see him for a few moments?"

Count Estamar's face became even graver.

"It is a veritable house of misfortune," he said sadly. "Poor Fritz! Though, as a matter of fact, it is far better that he is unconscious of this last shock. He loved Egon better than a brother, he idolized him, as indeed we all did."

"Yes, yes; but where is he?" rapped out Cleek; and the Count looked up in surprise at his impatience.

"Tarleschen had the misfortune to be knocked down when crossing Regent Street late last night; the car got away in the darkness. Egon, who must have been motoring down there half an hour after he left me, was passing at the time, and his horror on seeing Fritz injured can be imagined. He pushed his way through the crowd to the boy, picked him up, and drove him down to Charing Cross Hospital. Afterward he rang me up and told me all about it. I intended to go down and see the lad this morning, but this ——" He stopped abruptly and said no more. Cleek, with a sudden intaking of the breath, leaned forward.

"Did any message come?" he said at last.

"No, there was no post at all," put in Countess Adela, "and only Egon's new hat, sent on at the last minute from Leath's. It came, as a matter of fact, while he was in the study and was the cause of my being nearly discovered. Egon unlocked the door and tried the hat on then and there, going downstairs in it."

The curious little one-sided smile looped up the corner of Cleek's mouth.

"Well, there's nothing to be gained from that," he murmured in a low voice. "And so, Mauravania, we shall cross swords again!"

Then he turned abruptly to the Count.

"Count," he said quietly, "forgive me if I inflict an unpleasant duty on you, but I must see the body of your son. I understand it has been brought here, and I do not wish to ask the Countess ——"

The old man shivered and rose reluctantly. But before he could speak the young Countess had intervened.

"No, no, lieutenant. Pray do not consider my feelings. I am no weak, helpless girl. Do not give yourself fresh pain, Uncle Friedrich" — she turned almost caressingly to the old man — "I will lead Lieutenant Deland to the room."

She turned, her long, trailing dress dragging behind her like the tail feathers of a peacock; and the two men followed her, half admiring her for her courage, half wondering at her callousness.

"A woman scorned," muttered

Cleek; but he said nothing more, only bent over the mutilated body of what had evidently been a man of fine build and figure. It was not a pleasant duty and directly he had seen it and examined the one arm left uninjured, he replaced the sheet, stooping to pick up some shreds of cotton-wool which had fallen down at the side of the hastily improvised bier.

The sight of a brand-new leather hat box seemed to rivet his attention and he picked it up.

"This is the box, I suppose? A nice box. I could do with that myself," he said; and the Countess Adela looked at him scornfully.

"You are welcome to it," she said bitingly. "Anything that he ever touched should be burned, if I had my way. A traitor to his country, a traitor to the father who worshipped him, and to me who loved him! Come; the very room stifles me. I regret nothing — nothing!" she cried fiercely, and turning abruptly, left the room.

Cleek smiled oddly; then, to Mr. Narkom's intense surprise, picked up the hat box and brought it downstairs with him.

In the hall a ray of sunlight had streamed through the drawn blinds and striking one of the cut-glass prisms of the chandelier in the high roof, sent many little shafts of rainbow-colored light zigzagging across the marble floor. At sight of them Cleek's face went suddenly gray, curiously pinched, curiously tired.

"Impossible!" he said softly. "Utterly impossible! And yet, if it *is* ——"

He plunged down the stairs, at the bottom of which stood the Count looking the very picture of grief.

"Count," he said in a strangely quick voice, "I should like to make a few inquiries at the consulate, if you don't mind, for some possible clues; and I may have something to report at the end of the day. Thanks. Come along, Mr. Narkom."

He scuttled down the steps, followed by the bewildered Superintendent, and gave the direction to Lennard to "streak it" to Harebourn Square.

Lennard "streaked it" forthwith, and as the door closed behind them and they were alone, Mr. Narkom leaned forward and laid a hand upon Cleek's arm.

"Any ideas, old chap?" he said eagerly. But he hardly expected the reply Cleek gave him.

"Heaps!" said that gentleman enigmatically. "Heaps. But the solution lies in the rainbow, and those who made it, and if I only knew whether Count Egon used scented soap or not, I should be able to tell you a good deal more. At present, you shall go on to Harebourn Square and I will join you there in half an hour; if I haven't discovered something then, you may enjoy the tremendous pleasure of calling me a silly ass."

Mr. Narkom laughed, then he grunted admiringly, and as the limousine had slowed down on account of the traffic, Cleek unlatched the door, flashed it open, flashed it shut again, and he was gone, hat box and all.

It was a good half-hour before Cleek arrived at the house in Harebourn Square, around which had been placed a cordon of police to keep back the curious crowd.

Strangely enough, very little damage had been done to the actual room, and Cleek was able to examine it thoroughly. As Hammond had said, the floor was covered with one unbroken piece of linoleum, and it was self-evident that the invisible death had come from above and not below. It was a well-nigh impenetrable mystery, and Cleek stood looking down on the mess of plaster and bricks, pondering upon it with a little ridge between his brows. Suddenly a particle of black caught his eye, and he swooped down on it joyously with a little yap of delight.

"Got it!" he shouted. "Blithering idiot that I am! Why didn't I guess it before? That stuff could be knocked about until —— Of course ——" He plunged out of the room and down the steps, until he got to the line of policemen.

"I want the man on point duty," he flung out; then his eyes lit up again as a tall man stepped forward and saluted. "You, Boyce, is it? That's good. A man of your intelligence is bound to have noted something in this case. How many houses are there in this square altogether, and who live in them? Do you know?"

"Yes, sir, as it happens, I do," was the alert response. "There are only eight. We have had this house in view a long time and the other inhabitants of the eight houses are much annoyed about their privacy being broken in upon. This is the list."

He handed it to Cleek, who perused it with a sort of intensified eagerness, then handed it back to the man.

"No use climbing up *that* tree, then. Were there any suspicious characters in the square this morning — organ-grinders, or carts — when the explosion occurred?"

"No, sir; only a pantechnicon."

"Anybody moving?"

"No, sir; that's what made me look at it, not expecting to see one in a closed square like this, that and the funny look of the driver's seat. I took the name and address. Here it is, sir. Dallington & Co., Furnival Street. But when the explosion occurred, of course I rushed off, and I expect the van drove away, for I didn't see it again."

"H'm! And what was the funny part about the van's appearance?" put in Cleek placidly, twisting up in his fingers the tiny scrap of black stuff that lay in his hand.

Boyce gave an apologetic laugh.

"Nothing much, sir," said he, "but it struck me queer for it to be lined throughout with zinc. I couldn't help but think it was pretty cold to sit upon, and with a door at their back —— Why, lor' lumme, what is it, sir?" for Cleek gave vent to a little cry of unalloyed delight.

"The clever devils!" he rapped out sharply. "The clever devils! Splendid, Boyce, my lad. A lucky thing for you. This means promotion." Then he

turned to the Superintendent, who was standing near. "I know all I want to know now, Mr. Narkom," he said serenely, and straightway made for the limousine.

But at the door of it he paused, pulled out his notebook, scribbled something on a leaf, and put it into Mr. Narkom's hand. "Find out if that address is right and bring it to me at the Count's house in Curzon Street. I've got just one call to make and I'll join you there in half an hour."

Then he hopped into the limousine and was off in a jiffy.

And it was barely half an hour later when the Superintendent, pale with excitement, rushed up to the door of the house in Curzon Street and was admitted once more into the presence of Count Estamar and the Countess Adela. As he did so, there come the whirr of a motor and to his immense relief "Lieutenant Deland," immaculate as ever, stepped from it.

"Right, was I, Mr. Narkom?" he queried, smilingly, as he entered the room.

"Good lord! yes. Right as rain, old chap. The hospital authorities had never even heard of the accident, much less seen him."

"Good! And while you have been losing a patient at one hospital, I have been finding one at another." He turned back to the door and opened it. Outside, there was a confused hubbub of voices, and in the doorway appeared two servants, half carrying the bandaged figure of a man.

"Egon!" cried both the Count and Countess together; and they sped to him like two arrows impelled by a single bow.

Traitor or not, it was evident that affection still reigned in the hearts of both father and fiancée for this man who had faced death so shortly before.

"Get him to bed quickly," interposed Cleek, "or the doctors will not answer for his ultimate recovery. See; they are waiting." He waved to the door, where appeared a silk-hatted figure and two hospital nurses who, in a twinkling, had recovered their patient and carried him off upstairs.

"But what does it mean? Who is that other?" Count Estamar made a gesture as referring to the dead man upstairs.

"Who should it be," gave back Cleek grimly, "but the traitor, the ingrate, Gustave Moselle, *alias* Fritz Tarleschen, hoist with his own petard."

"Fritz! My God! *Fritz!*" broke out the Count excitedly. "It is incredible — impossible! *Fritz!* Then does it mean that Egon, my son, is not, after all ——"

"A — traitor," concluded Cleek softly, with a tender smile. "No, Count, no traitor comes from your line. The bonny boy! How was it possible that such as he could betray his country? No, Countess von Altburg, you let your jealousy run away with you when you fancied it was your lover talking to the head of the Apache gang. Indeed, it was Tarleschen, clad in his clothing."

"But he could not speak," protested the girl perplexedly, her eyes shining.

"He pretended he could not," was the grim reply. "But he could speak well enough when, having borrowed Count Egon's car, he followed in the wake of his beloved young master, and having seen him run down by a member of the Apache gang, came forward and identified him as Fritz Tarleschen. Then, like a good Samaritan, he offered to drive him down to the hospital. That he did not do so, Mr. Narkom has just proved; but I was doubly sure, because I picked Count Egon up myself, stripped of all his belongings, on Hampstead Heath this morning, and I drove him to the Cottage Hospital there. The only word he could say was 'Tarleschen.' He was evidently crossing the road to get to his friend when he was knocked down. I reckoned that it was his own name till I heard of the other accident. It was Tarleschen's idea to leave him to die on the Heath, where he threw him out of the car, so that he could make up like him and sell the plans to the French spies. He must have had a fright when the Countess von Altburg rang up at the consulate.

"Unfortunately for our friend, the Italian spies had had their eye on these papers and had evidently found out that Count Egon was going to take them; and they determined to experiment with their new and latest discovery, the ultra-violet rays. You've seen the diagram of the spectrum, Countess, and, as you know, white light is composed of the seven prismatic colors; but there are other rays on either side of the visible spectrum — those on the red being heat rays, and on the violet, the chemical, cathode and Röntgen rays, and smaller ones still, known collectively as the ultra-violet rays. Now, given the right exploding materials, these rays will go right through bricks, stone, earth, aluminum, or anything else you may care to experiment on — but they are stopped by zinc. So when I found that a zinc-cased pantechnicon had stopped outside the house on the other side of the square, I knew what had happened. Yes, on such little things do big events hang, and had not Tarleschen stopped to steal the Count's hat, even then he would have escaped.

"What's that, Mr. Narkom? What had the hat got to do with it? Everything, for it was lined with the new gun cotton, which is composed largely of nitryl, and can be handled as roughly as you please until the disintegrating powers of the chemical rays of light are applied. I found a piece of the hat, and examined the hat box, which was obviously one of foreign make, and not, therefore, belonging to Leath's, of Oxford Street. It hardly needed my inquiry there to tell me that they had sent neither boy nor hat box. Probably the telephone was tapped, and when Mr. Tarleschen laid his plans with Margot, the Mauravanians, acting with the Italian spies, followed on with their death-dealing pantechnicon. I expect they reckoned

to wipe out the French spies. At any rate, they didn't attain their object."

Cleek stopped, and fumbling in his pocket, brought out an officially sealed envelope, upon which Count Estamar threw himself and opened it with trembling fingers.

"Where — where was it?" he exclaimed, as he ran the precious papers through his fingers.

Cleek's eyes twinkled.

"In Count Egon's red flannel chest protector, which Tarleschen never thought of touching. I expect he must have had some fears himself, and possibly he came back and left a dummy copy in the consulate, and sewed up the real things next to his own brave young heart. With care he should pull through, and he never should know how he was misjudged by those nearest and dearest to him."

The Count looked at the young Countess, the Countess sent her eyes back to the old Count's; then their heads came together.

Cleek turned away. Who was he but an outsider to intrude upon their joy? He smiled serenely at the Superintendent.

"What's that, Mr. Narkom? The soap?" said he. "Why, when I picked up my patient, he smelled strongly of soap scented with 'Ambré Ideal,' but the supposed Count did not. To make absolutely sure, however, I rang up his valet. The answer was 'Yes.' So there, you see, is the whole matter in a nutshell."

He turned back once more to where the old Count stood looking at him out of grateful, tear-wet eyes, with the Countess Adela clinging to his arm.

"Lieutenant," said that gentleman brokenly, in a mere thread of a voice, "Lieutenant Deland, how can I thank you for what you have done? Had it not been for you, my son would surely have died out there upon the Heath, hidden in the cloak of a traitor, and dishonor would have fallen upon my family's name. As it is ——"

He threw out his hands, shrugged his shoulders, and let the rest of the sentence go by default, while Cleek, with a whimsical smile, put out his hand toward the Countess's, and raised hers to his lips.

"Goodbye, Countess," he said quietly, "and God bless the pair of you. You've a bonny boy in that future husband of yours, and he has a proud lady for whom he should be justly thankful. Goodbye, Count; goodbye. Don't mention it. I assure you, anything I have done has been more than a pleasure, for it has but helped to preserve the honor of a great gentleman, and to show that the same staunch, honorable blood flows in his son's veins as in his own."

He picked up his hat and gloves, touched Mr. Narkom upon the arm, strode over to the door, and then stood in the frame of it, erect, tall, the unmistakable stamp of the aristocrat upon him.

"Ah, Count," said he in a low, even voice, "just one more little thing. My name, by the way, is not Deland, as you have supposed, but Cleek — just Cleek of Scotland Yard."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Howard Bloomfield's desire to write began when he won a literary prize in high school twenty-odd years ago. He went to Harvard with the fixed notion of becoming a writer some day. After college he took a job as a reporter and from time to time he managed to sell a story, but he now admits that his progress was slow. Then he became editor of a detective-story magazine and before he realized it, a dozen years had passed. About eight years ago he decided to take the plunge — to be or not to be a writer. He put his wife and small son on a sailboat and off they cruised to Florida, spending eight months afloat. Out of this experience came a book — about life on the Inland Waterway.*

"It was wonderful," Mr. Bloomfield says, "after all those years of commuting with a newspaper and manuscripts to put your own little world on a boat, anchor in strange places, watch the weather and learn some stars, sail south until the palm trees were all around and toss a line to a tropical fish. But it couldn't go on forever. For one thing, a boat is not a good place to write — there are too many interesting things to see and do."

Mr. Bloomfield discovered, however, that a dozen years of story editing do not teach a person much about story writing. It is told that faith moves mountains but Mr. Bloomfield's ignorance of his own trade forced him eventually to move a building. He had built himself a little office in which to write and had hidden it among some trees with a blank wall between him and the water. Naively he had assumed that the blank wall would prevent him from being distracted by skipjacks and crab boats sailing by on the other side of the wall. But it proved infinitely more distracting to find himself irresistibly drawn away from his office — to make sure he wasn't missing anything! So he jacked up the little building, put rollers under it, and moved it nearer to the water's edge. Now it's a better place to sit in and to write in. You will understand why when you read Howard Bloomfield's dramatic re-creation of his own problem, so aptly titled "The Trap."

THE TRAP

by HOWARD BLOOMFIELD

THE way that Armstrong Destin tried to put George Turner overboard was simple, and yet it held a trick, a touch of drama. The trick was misdirection: a focusing of the eye on one spot, and not letting

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the right hand know what the left hand is doing.

The old Nassau sloop wallowed along with a broad arrow of foam at the bow and a gay bubble and froth sweeping out under the fat stern, because the trade wind could make any boat move, even though the boat waved foul grasses from its bottom like this sloop of Destin's. George Turner felt himself living in the middle of a color film and, at times, during the past two days, he had closed his eyes and opened them again, convincing himself of a vividness that was a blow on the eyeballs. The foam was so white, the sky so blue; and the dozens of sandy keys were golden chips on a sea of jade satin. And some of the keys wore dark green tufts of vegetation, though empty of human life — the Bahamas hold scores and hundreds of such tiny low islands, useless but pretty.

This was old stuff to Destin, but to George Turner it was adventure. Turner was a slight, wiry man, with brown face and brown hair, and brown eyes behind his glasses. His face gave an occasional pleased twitch, and his eyes blinked like an owl's. He kept thinking that pirate ships had sailed these waters, and it was easy to picture one here, prowling boldly, full of fighting men who were not at all like himself, men more like Destin.

The sun was beginning to set, and here it was a bigger red ball than elsewhere, and a red-and-gold cloud was a brighter and longer banner.

"Damned beautiful," said George Turner, jerking his fishing rod at the sunset. "And a good moon to come. We can go on sailing, huh?"

"Sure," said Destin. "Get us there sooner." Destin was taking him to a place where they could look down through clear water and see the ribs of an old wreck and the shape of a cannon.

Destin got up from the tiller, planted one foot across it to steer by, and stretched and yawned lazily. He was a bigger man than Turner, but the difference was more striking than that. He was a strong male animal, even if he seemed a sort of gentleman on the surface. Aside from the long knife scar down his forearm, it was plain to see that Destin had been in dangers and tight places and had fought his own fights and made his own laws.

As Destin put his right hand over his yawning mouth, a gleam in his ring caught his eye. The ring was a heavy band of gold, with a green stone that was square and large. Destin held out his hand, turning it, letting the light strike into the stone.

"You ever notice this ring?" he asked George Turner. "It was found in an old wreck. I got the ring off a dead man, down in Port-au-Prince. I took it for a souvenir. Look at this engraving — I think it's Spanish."

While Turner stepped to him, Destin made his hand into a fist and remarked, "Not a bad brass knuckle, if a man ever needs one." He relaxed the fist and spread out his fingers.

Turner gazed down at the worn, indistinct chasing on either side of the stone.

"The man I took the ring from tried to kill me, when I wasn't expecting a thing," said Destin. "Do you notice, right next to the stone —"

Then George Turner was staggering, reeling, on the very edge of the stern, flailing his fishing rod for balance. The unexpected shove by Destin's left hand would have sent him overboard at once, except that he had tensed a little to hear Destin's story of killing the man.

In his wild gyration he saw that Destin's fist was cocked again, and behind it Destin's face was astonishingly savage. Turner smashed the heavy deep-sea reel on his rod against that face, for he had succeeded in swaying inward on the boat. Then Destin wrenched the rod down, but Turner, on his feet again, whipped a fish knife from the sheath at his belt. It opened a red streak on Destin's arm, and Destin turned and jumped down into the cabin.

Turner gasped, trying to realize what had happened. It had been only a few bewildering seconds since he was staring at Destin's ring, and now Destin was bleeding in the cabin. Turner stood in paralysis of fright, and then he thought of the revolver on a shelf below.

Turner raced forward in a panic to get off the boat, to dive and swim madly away. The sloop, its tiller free, was rounding into the wind, the sails shaking and banging. But it could come under control again in a minute, and follow and overtake him like a porpoise charging upon a fish. He slashed the main halyard. The big leg-of-mutton sail came down like a snowslide, a rotten topping lift broke, the boom was a thick club smiting the cabin roof. Destin was just coming up out of the hatchway when the boom struck his shoulder and knocked him below.

Turner slashed the jib halyard. The jib, on its slanting head stay, came down in a gentler folding fall.

The mainsail lay all over the hatchway like a great canvas rug, and the rug heaved up over a crawling form. George Turner delayed his departure one instant more, to run back and snatch the fishing rod. He swung the heavy reel down on the moving bulge and the bulge backed into the cabin.

Then Turner in his fear went overboard. The water closed round him in a cool safe bath and swept some of his fright away. A strange crashing sound had entered his ears when he dove, because the cork helmet was still on his head, held by a strap under his chin.

He swam furiously at first, and instinct told him to go upwind, because the sloop would be drifting away down the wind. When he looked back, the sloop was only a hundred yards away, a dark bulk. Though the night would not come for a while, the boat was dark because it lay against the red stain of sunset, in reddening water. Destin was not yet on deck.

Turner sprinted again. A slow ground swell heaved and fell, like a leisurely breathing of the sea. A man would be hidden in the hollow, and Turner tried to stay there, but he could not swim quite fast enough, and so he went under in a dead man's float when he felt himself being lifted, and began to swim again when he was lowered. Out of breath, he trod water for another look. Destin was on deck, walking and turning slowly, no doubt searching the water. Farther away than Turner had expected, until he thought again of the downwind drift of the boat.

Turner remembered the dinghy lashed upside down on deck, and he wished he were in it. There had been time — it seemed now — to get it overboard. Turner was bitter that he had not thought there was time. He could not even remember if he had thought of the dinghy at all; and the bitterness engulfed him and made him feel heavy and tired in the water. It was too late now to think of all the things he should have done.

Turner wondered if Destin would come after him in the dinghy. Unless he came soon and fast, he would risk losing the sloop in the night. Unless — Turner's brain kept making quick snaps at the situation, like the snaps of a cornered dog — unless Destin should hang up a lantern first, so he could find the sloop again. Destin couldn't come after him in the sloop without a job of rigging first, because the severed halyards had whipped aloft and run out of the blocks.

Thinking of that, the immediate fear of Destin went out of George Turner. He swam along slowly on his back, keeping his feet toward the dull maroon in the west. That color faded so rapidly, while stars came out in a slow sprinkle, that he picked a star to keep him straight on his course to nowhere.

The water was comfortably warm. Turner remembered reading once of a man who floated in the Gulf Stream for a week and was saved — true, he was unconscious and supported by a life preserver. But Turner thought he had at least a few hours ahead of him. The human body was ninety-eight per cent — was it more? — water, and flotation was only a matter of ounces. He floated quite easily so long as he lay on his back as if in a loose strait-jacket, but if he tried to turn the water gushed into his nose and mouth.

The pith helmet that was now under the back of his head seemed to help a bit, though it might slowly become a soggy thing. Already he imagined that a part of the brim flapped loosely against his neck as each push of his hands moved him onward a little more.

He was dressed only in shirt and shorts and sandals. He thought of stuffing the helmet inside his shirt, but it gave him a weak comfort under his head, as if his head were really lying on something. And perhaps the sandals helped a bit, being of a composition cork sole. But a man could float, without helmet or sandals.

A man had a few ounces of buoyancy in himself.

Turner tried to think reasonably about it. Life was a few ounces that would rather float; Death was a few ounces that would rather sink. He was in a big, warm swimming pool. He was lying on a kind of fluid couch, pushing himself along it by his hands, and covered all over but for his eyes and nose and mouth. But a swimming pool has sides and ends, and a ladder for climbing out, and a swimming pool holds no sharks and barracuda. He tried not to think about that.

So Turner was immensely lonely. He imagined he heard friends wondering aloud what had become of him. He saw an office in Pittsburgh where soot fell on papers ready for him to sign, where familiar faces of men and women turned to one another and talked about him, not knowing that a man named Destin had dissolved a partnership with abrupt violence. Turner was utterly shaken — he had liked to be with Destin, had secretly admired Destin's strength and his adventurous life. Now Turner was only two eyes and two nostrils in a black liquid world because he had put funds with Destin in a beef-cattle venture on a large island near Nassau — a plausible-looking experiment, a joint account with some cautious safeguards. Cautions against everything except one big thing that had never occurred to Turner: that he should suddenly be dead and it would all belong to Destin.

George Turner thought the night grew a little brighter, and trod water to stare eastward where the moon rose full. He searched the horizon for an island he thought might be there, and saw nothing but the silver path of the moon across the water. He then sobbed suddenly, and wanted to scream and claw at the water and go down, swallow water and fill his lungs and have the thing over — and told himself to go on pushing with his hands, and that all these islands were very low.

A new and startling sound came through the water that so quietly lapped and patted around his face. It was a slashing noise, like canvas being ripped, of something coming toward him very fast, and Turner went rigid, though trembling violently. In his rigidity his feet sank down until he was almost upright, and then, the slashing coming very close to him, he screamed and beat his arms and legs and tried to climb out of the water. He fought himself into exhaustion, and then saw the moonlight glisten on the shining black hides of a school of porpoise leaping and diving past him.

After that Turner was very tired. He rested on his back, his hands moving as if they belonged to someone else, his eyes on the star and his head toward the low moon, until he heard another sound ahead of him. This was a gurgling, rather rhythmical and musical sound. He trod water to look, and found his feet standing on sand.

Through a lapping froth he went ashore on the island, which was one of the three he had seen within several miles while he slashed the halyards; and this was undoubtedly the one to the eastward.

The island was about three quarters of a mile long, and half as wide, and a broad rim of sandy beach ran all around it. Turner followed the beach, walking to get warm — the breeze chill on his wet skin — until he came to his own footprints again. So low was the island that, under the bright moon, he could see across it from beach to beach. In the middle were tufts of wiry grass and one low clump of bushes. That might shade a man who crawled into it; that might make a hideaway, if a man could hide at the end of a track of footprints. Some sea birds went up with crazy screams as Turner walked among nests. Here was food, when a man began to starve. The thicket was thorny, and he went back to the beach. He lay on the warm sand and pulled it over him like a blanket.

Along the windward beach stretched a snake of sea grasses and kelp. Turner heaved up out of the sand and prowled carefully. A heavy timber of ship's deadwood, studded with rusted spikes, lay rooted in the beach. Here and there was some odd useless thing, dropped off a steamer long ago and perhaps hundreds of miles away. An electric light bulb. Three rum bottles. A little vial that had held someone's tonic, or vitamin pills.

Something round and big crawled out of the sea, moved patiently up the beach, and began to settle into the sand. A sea turtle, feeling the pressure of eggs. A man could eat, now and then, on this island. He could roof over some bushes with seaweed. Likely he could get a fire for cooking, with water in a curved shoulder of a bottle to make a burning glass. He might even unravel a fishing line out of his clothes. He could get himself some scraps of food. But there wasn't any water.

Turner broke a bottle on a spike and began to dig near the bushes. Below the sand was a crumbling coral rock that became harder, then too hard. He imagined dampness in the bottom of the hole. He decided it was only cooler than the surface sand.

Turner began to arrange seaweed into letters ten paces long on the beach. Sea draped its grasses in slow twists along the sand. The angular lines of H E L P would show better than S O S from the air. Someday someone in a plane would go over; perhaps a sportsman, making a wide swing, then circling and staring at a big word H E L P. Turner began another message for the man who came down to investigate, if the man came too late. In small letters he traced out *Armstrong Destin killed George Turner*, and began to build up the letters with shells, into ridges. But now the moon was dropping low, and the night turned darker. He lay down to wait for daylight.

When the sun came up, Destin's sails were a fluttering white tent two

miles away. The sloop was anchored off a sandy key. The little white dinghy moved to the beach. It was hard for Turner to follow the dinghy at that distance, and Destin he could hardly see at all — a small black mark on the sand. The dinghy moved off the beach. The sloop began to sail. Destin was looking over the few near-by islands before he sailed away, rowing in and glancing about for footprints. And now he sailed toward Turner's island.

Turner fell on the sand and beat it with his fists. He poured out hoarse curses at the boat. A man might try to hide. But it would be at the end of a plain trail. Turner stared at the sloop, the fat curve of sail, the white curl round the bow, with wincing eyes. He was a thin brown animal with a leg caught in a trap of sand, watching the hunter come. He sat down in the middle of the island and pushed up a sand wall around him, like a breastwork. It was a fort but with no defense. His pith helmet and his face were fixed still above it as he watched the sloop grow, the jib coming distinct from the mainsail, the figure of Destin standing up. The sloop held food and water. Turner remembered just where they were: the canned goods, the crate of fruit, the big galvanized tank beneath the deck. The cigarettes, the bottles of rum. They were all only a quarter of a mile away when Destin dropped the sails. The anchor made a brief white splash.

The dinghy trailed behind the sloop. Destin jumped down into it and began to row, turned his head, and pulled the oars harder. Destin knew. Turner watched the powerful back and arms move with the blades, and when the head did not turn again, Turner knew that Destin was very sure of himself. Destin would speak to him quite calmly. Destin might say, "Sorry, old man. You've only managed to string the thing out." He would be calm and steady with the pistol.

String the thing out. But if he strung it out, he would die of thirst. All that Destin really had to do was to sit on his boat and let him die. Turner saw that he must try to be calm and conserve his strength. He had an emptiness in his stomach that wasn't really hunger, and he hadn't yet so very much thirst. The day was brightening beautifully, the sea sparkling, the breeze cool, the sky very blue and the clouds very white above him and Destin.

Turner slipped out of the back of his sand pit, and on the far beach filled a bottle with sea water. The splash over his hands and wrists, the water round his ankles, made him more conscious of the dryness in his throat. He went in a crouch along the beach until the clump of bushes was between him and the dinghy. Into the dry hole he had dug, he emptied the bottle. The water stood still for a moment, and then began to seep away. Turner filled the bottle again on the beach, and crawled back into his pit.

He sat up and looked over the top at Destin, who now was pulling the dinghy up on the sand.

"Destin!" he called.

Destin looked toward him briefly, without reply. He had seen the big word on the sand. He walked around it deliberately and cast a slow look round the sky. Evidently he came to the smaller message that Turner had started, for his feet made some measured kicks and sent up spurts of sand. Then with wide sweeps of his legs he went through the letters H E L P, driving the letters out of shape. Taking the revolver out of his trousers, he walked toward Turner. He called, "Good morning!"

Turner was not much exposed in his sand pit, only his head up, a glint of sunlight on his glasses, and his legs were tense under him. A hundred yards and no closer, he thought — about the length of a football field. He got up and began to walk away from Destin. He carried the bottle of sea water like a precious thing. Destin fired. Then they were both running.

Turner thought he could hold his own with Destin in running, though he was much less of a man in every other way. But he was lighter, and in Pittsburgh he had liked to play tennis. He saw some flicks in the sand ahead, and counted the shots until there were six. He looked back, and Destin was not so close as he had been. The distance had opened very definitely. Destin stopped, taking a box from his pocket, and reloaded.

Destin sat down. Turner was quite out of breath himself, and so he lay on the sand, pulling a heap up under his shoulders for a head rest, to relax as comfortably as he could. A hundred yards was a very long revolver shot. It called for luck, even if the target stood still.

There had been a box of cartridges beside the gun on the shelf, and a box held twenty-five. Two or three had been fired at a shark. Perhaps there was another box.

Destin had a white bandage on his arm. Turner could not be sure at the distance, but he thought there was a red streak across his face, the nose swollen, where the reel had struck. Destin's broad shoulders heaved slowly as he rested, watching Turner. Turner held the bottle at his mouth, and did not swallow. Even the motion made his throat drier. Destin stood up to glare at him with both hands on hips, and then looked at the clump of bushes, as the only likely place for water.

When Destin walked away, Turner ran toward the dinghy. The attempt was hopeless, as Destin had kept himself closer to the boat. But it made Destin sprint for an instant, and fire another shot. Destin pushed the dinghy out and rowed along the beach, and Turner walked beside him, though across a wide reach of sand. Turner saw now that he might make it difficult for Destin to go far from his boat. At least he could give Destin a problem to solve.

Destin saw the problem, too, when

he pulled in to the beach abreast of the low thicket. Turner watched him from a hundred yards away. Destin chased him up the beach, shot three times, and one of the bullets made a hiss. Then Destin walked toward the bushes. Turner ran back toward the dinghy. Destin ran back, too.

The thicket was at least two hundred yards from the beach. Destin took the oars from the boat, and started again. And Turner's heart leaped, hoping that Destin would rely on having the oars. He slipped toward the dinghy as Destin left it, thinking he could push it ahead of him by swimming, get into it and paddle with his hands. Destin came back on a run, but clumsily, because it was difficult to run with the oars, and fired a long shot.

Turner thought that Destin must be very angry. Destin sat near the boat a while. Then he shoved it off, and rowed toward his sloop.

Lifting the bottle again, Turner walked to the thicket. He stopped at the hole he had dug. He might have felt some elation at baffling Destin, but now he felt only an aching thirst. He had thought that Destin might examine the hole, feel some dampness, and wonder. But Destin could not approach the place. Turner poured the water over his face and chest, and noticed that Destin had stopped rowing. He shoved the bottle down into the dry hole, and then walked with it toward some sea-bird nests.

Eggs held moisture. A score of birds wheeled and screamed and dived at Turner, who carried a dozen eggs to his sand pit in his helmet.

He cracked two together, finding one liquid, and swallowed it, with fingers closed over his nose. But he retched; the egg came up. Then he remembered the mound, the scuffed place, the turtle had left. He dug with his hands. The leathery skin of eggs broke in his teeth with a relieving wet salve. He covered the place carefully and marked it with a shell.

Turner lay in the edge of the water. A man could not evaporate so much water when he was immersed, and perhaps he would absorb a little. The constant lapping was maddening.

After a time he went back to the wreckage of his word. The sand was very hot, and it was fortunate he had his sandals. The heat soared round him in shimmering bands. On the sloop Destin was undoubtedly eating, drinking and having a smoke, training his binoculars on Turner. When Turner had raked the seaweed all into ridges again, and the letters were sharp on bare sand, when he had walked around it in final perusal, Destin rowed ashore.

Turner watched over the rim of his sand pit while Destin struck a match. The seaweed was mostly very dry, though some was still green. But there was plenty more of it, rolling in the edge of the water. The seaweed burned. But it sent up a thickening smudge, like a windrow of hay flaming and smoldering, trailing off the key like steamer smoke. Destin did not like that. He kicked the fire apart,

flung sand on it, and kicked a path through the remaining letters.

"Are you here again?" called Turner. "Let's play another set."

He seemed very calm, waiting for Destin. But the calm was a weakness, a dizziness of heat and thirst. He let Destin come almost too close, or the shot was lucky. It tossed sand up into Turner's face. It buried in the low sand wall just in front of his chest, and Turner jumped up and ran.

Two other shots passed him. When he glanced back, Destin was hammering after him, his face dark, running at a strong, ruthless gait, driving his legs with a will power that was ready to run his heart out. Turner couldn't leave him, though he had panic in his body. The distance closed a little. It was very hard to run in sand, sinking to the ankles, gulping air that was too hot to ease the lungs. He was almost ready to fling himself down when another shot sounded. He turned his head. Destin had stopped. Destin aimed at him, emptied the revolver, sat down to rock his head and body slowly, to open his mouth like a fish.

Turner was relieved that Destin sat for such a long while before he tried to approach again. Turner tilted the mockery of a bottle, stood up with an appearance of lightness, and walked away. Destin left the beach to Turner. Destin took the center of the ring, and the center was too small for them both. He kept Turner moving round the rim — Turner taking two and three steps to his one — trying to pin him in one spot against the sea. There was little running, except when Turner had to make quick spurts to hold his distance. Turner's head and eyeballs ached, and at times his legs stumbled; but whenever there was an appearance of a chance, or whenever Destin wanted to rest, he moved doggedly toward the boat. Once Destin roared in rage, and at last he went to the shore and sat on the stern of the dinghy.

Turner lay in the water once more, rolling his burned face under, filling his mouth and blowing it out, and soaking some coolness into his skin. The water bottle was hot. He immersed it to cool. He could get through today. He had had luck against Destin, but tomorrow he could not escape. Tomorrow he would be too weak; he would collapse on the burning sand.

Destin slid the dinghy to sea. Turner sat up and felt the temperature of his bottle, and put it to his mouth.

"Turner!" shouted Destin. "See you tomorrow!"

Turner called back, "Sweet dreams!"

What was the ruse for tonight? he wondered. Would Destin come ashore, trying to catch him asleep. Would he risk leaving the dinghy on the moonlit beach while he searched? Turner considered whether he should himself try to swim out, whether he had the strength — a fly crawling to a spider. Only one thing was certain. Destin dared not leave.

The sun had not yet gone down. Turner looked around the empty sky, and began to restore his word on the beach.

At daybreak Destin rowed in to the seaweed printing. He kicked out the bellies of the letters once more, but with a difference in his motions this time, not swinging his arms with the violence of his kicks, but keeping a hand behind his back in concealment from the sand pit. Then he made his steps casually slow, as if a long day were ahead and there was no need for haste. The hand remained behind him in a careless way, while he walked toward the defenseless breastwork. Once he stopped to yawn.

Turner saw that the slow approach had taken Destin a little closer to the sand pit than usual.

Turner saw this, from a comfortable distance, when he emerged from the sand and raised himself through the seaweed in the end of one leg of the letter H.

Turner saw Destin kneel and aim at the helmet, with the glint of spectacles beneath it, and fire. Destin had lashed some kind of stock to the revolver, that nestled snugly like a rifle butt into his shoulder, and evidently greatly increased the accuracy of his aim. For the helmet, the glasses, rolled down out of sight. Turner supposed that there was a hole right through the skull-dry coconut.

The dinghy was only a few steps away, and as Turner pushed it out he saw that Destin was running, in triumph at last, toward the sand pit.

An uncontrollable shivering ran over Turner as he rowed. But he wasn't cold — each grain of sand and fleck of seaweed touched a nerve end in his burned skin. But this was from the hours of waiting.

The water in the sloop's tank was warm, yet it had a deliciousness, an ecstatic seep of life in his parched throat. Turner reminded himself not to drink too much at once. He went on deck to raise the jib, because that was the easy sail. The jib would move the boat sufficiently until he had eaten and drunk enough strength into himself to hoist the mainsail. The windlass was heavy enough work for now, and he did not trouble to bring the anchor all the way up. The sloop began to move.

Turner would conscientiously report Destin at the first chance, he decided, though it might be a few days, and the government could send out a plane to rescue him and let him explain. And if Destin grew too impatient with his thirst, then — Turner's trembling ceased of a sudden — Destin had a gun.

Turner drank another glass of water, sipping each wonderful drop, and sucked the juices out of a sapodilla plum, and presently looked at the island through the binoculars. He regretted his glasses, but the binoculars focused clearly.

The plane would be able to find Destin, because Destin had an armful of seaweed and was restoring the big word H E L P on the beach.

EYE WITNESS

by DAVID X. MANNERS

A THIN bluish vapor still writhed and curled from the muzzle of the automatic as Frankie Sardi shoved it back into the holster under his arm. With cold unconcern he turned and walked from the room, and as he slowly shut the door behind him, he took one last sneering, triumphal glance at the lifeless body of Vince Salica slouched in a straight-backed, wooden chair on the far side of a card table.

Five bullets remained in the magazine of Sardi's .38 automatic as he noiselessly slipped down the outside stairs out of the now-deserted roadhouse. Four slugs had buried themselves in quick succession in the head and body of Vince Salica.

Sardi was chuckling to himself as he climbed into the car that waited for him at the bottom of the flight. "Home, James," he sang out merrily to the driver who sat behind the wheel.

The tough-faced driver turned slowly. "Usin' four shots again, huh, Frankie? Don't you think that's gettin' like leavin' a calling card behind?"

Sardi eyed him disdainfully. "Aw, forget it," he said with a wave of his hand. "Anyway, do yuh think I'm scared? I believe in doing my work for keeps." His words rolled fast and smooth from his well-oiled tongue. "What do you want me to do? Just take two shots at a guy? Why, you can't even be sure with three. But there ain't no guy livin' who can take *four* slugs without trippin' down the primrose path."

Sardi settled down comfortably in his seat and puffed forcefully on a newly lighted cigar. He liked that little speech about his "four-shot" philosophy. In fact he liked everything about himself. He was a "plenty wise guy," and he knew it.

The moon-washed hills of the countryside slipped by, and soon they were back in town again. At Sixth and Eastlake, Sardi got out, and with a parting wink to the driver, he turned and walked into his place of business.

Behind the door inscribed "Private," Sardi spent the better part of an hour meticulously cleaning his gun. The glum, vacuous expression on the rotund blob of fat that was his face showed that he had something on his mind. It seemed that he still had one little detail to attend to.

When Manny Zwick dropped around an hour or so later, Sardi made known to him that the "little detail" was Babyface Joey Fine.

"Joey?" Manny repeated in unbelievable surprise. "Why, he's just a kid. Why he —"

Originally published in Ten Detective Aces. Copyright, 1934, by Magazine Publishers, Inc.

"Yeh, I know, I know," broke in Sardi. "I heard all that kind of stuff about him, but that don't mean nothin' to me. It's just a business proposition. He's getting a little too wise for his tender years, and he's gotta go."

Manny nervously bit his lower lip. "Listen, Frankie," he urged, "you got rid of Mauri Sneller, and wiped out that little rat Vince Salica without so much as a buzz from the cops. But those guys were bad eggs. This boy Joey Fine is well liked down at headquarters. Those dicks'll haul yuh in."

Sardi's nervous lips quivered in impatience. "Listen, Manny, you know dicks don't cut no ice with me. Anyway, when I get through, those coppers won't have enough evidence to hang a necktie on." A smile broke on his face as he lowered his voice. "It's all gonna be innocent and sweet."

A short while later Sardi squeezed into the mahogany-stained phone booth in the rear corner of his drug store. There was the clink of a nickel in a slot, half a dozen winding zips of the phone dial, and Fine was on the other end of the wire.

"Frankie speakin'," Sardi grunted as he flicked the ashes off a stubby cigar in his right hand with his little finger. "I got something lined up for you in San Diego. Drop around and see me at my room tonight. Yeh, ten o'clock's all right."

At nine-thirty the beefy gangster walked between the white columns that stood on either side of the entrance to the Colonial Hotel. He got his mail at the desk, mumbled something about "catching a rattler for the East" to the clerk, and asked that he be called at five-thirty in the morning.

The elevator dropped him off on the nineteenth floor and he walked directly to his room. He undressed, and put his wallet under a half-dozen or so shirts in the top drawer of his dresser and quietly placed his reloaded automatic under his pillow.

He took a look out of each of the two windows in his room before he pulled down the shades and drew together the heavy, écru drapes. He crawled into bed, and it was no later than nine forty-five when the lights in his room went out.

At ten sharp there was a knock on the door. Sardi breathed a quiet, quick "Come in." The door opened part way and Joey Fine slipped through. For a moment the boy fumbled in the dark for the light switch near the door, but Sardi quickly rolled over and snapped on the switch near his bed.

Fine's slim, young face looked clean-cut, and his pearly white teeth showed as he half smiled in awkward self-consciousness.

Sardi nodded. "I got a wire from Hy Williams down in San Diego today okayin' a little proposition that would be just the thing for you, Joey," he said in a confidential tone. He pointed a tobacco-stained finger toward his dresser. "The wire's in the top drawer. You can get it out."

Sardi's eyes glinted and a frown

spread over his face as Fine unsuspectingly turned his back and walked toward the dresser.

The gangster's hand slid under his pillow. It came out clutching his automatic.

Sardi thrust it calmly under the blanket as Fine turned momentarily. There were two top drawers.

The gangster smiled wryly. "It's in the left-hand drawer," he explained patiently. "You'll find it in my billfold under those shirts. Just take it out."

Fine reached down into the bottom of the drawer, and pulled out the wallet. Instantly four shots rang out in quick succession. The impact of the bullets seemed to swing him half around. His eyes were glassy wide in incomprehension. With a throaty groan he pitched face forward to the floor. Sardi's upper lip curled in surly disgust. He tossed the gun on a low table near his bed, and from the same table, he lifted a phone receiver.

"Call the police — quick!" he jerked. "I've just shot a robber!"

Slowly he cradled the receiver, and still holding the instrument in his hands, he thoughtfully pondered over the situation. Confidently he slipped his tongue in his cheek. "It's the oldest game in the world," he whispered, "but I'll get away with it."

Sardi had no sooner slipped on a robe than the door of his room opened. In came the house detective. His face was flushed, nervous.

"I'm Detective Moorehead of the house," he began brokenly. "What is it you —" He sucked in his breath sharply as his eyes fell on the body.

Slowly he treaded over to the dresser and stood by the lifeless form. He seemed a little frightened. "Robbery, eh?" he asked gravely.

Sardi nodded with a feigned dejectedness. Inwardly he was pleased by the detective's timidity at the sight of death.

"We've got in touch with Lieutenant O'Rourke," the detective said, clearing his throat. "This is a matter for the police, of course."

His last words were almost lost in a confused scuffle of pounding feet as four men barged into the room. Two were patrolmen, the others plainclothesmen, all of the homicide squad.

The tallest of the group was apparently Lieutenant O'Rourke. With darting eyes he took in the layout.

"Well, Frankie, so at last we've got you red-handed," he growled, leveling a gun at Sardi. "And for out-and-out murder, too!"

Sardi sneered contemptuously. "Put down the rod, flatfoot," he jeered. "I'd be sprung in two minutes if you ever took me in for this, and I wouldn't need a crooked mouthpiece or a phoney writ, either. Believe it or not, it so happens that I was asleep in bed when this mug busts into my room and tries to lift some dough of mine. So I let him have it, and I don't mean the dough."

The police lieutenant took one look at the dead man. "Babyface Joey Fine! You know him, don'cha?"

"It so happens that I do. And I'm sorry for his folks that he was so dumb as to try a stunt like this." Sardi paused as he saw his story wasn't making the impression he wanted it to make. "If I'd had cat's eyes and could have seen in the dark that it was Joey, I'd have given him a break. But how in hell could you expect me to take a chance, not knowin' who it was?"

O'Rourke knelt down beside Fine's body and studied the manner in which the billfold was held. "It looks legitimate enough," he confessed, after a short study. "The wallet wasn't planted on him." Suddenly his face brightened a bit. "A dresser drawer's an awful funny place to keep five thousand in cash, ain't it, Frankie?"

Sardi regarded the lieutenant sourly. "Listen, gumshoe, I expect dough to be safe any place when I'm around. Anyway, a place like that should be about the last place a smart crook should think of looking."

O'Rourke was plainly puzzled. "I'm achin' to pull you in for this," he began with a resigned bitterness, "but I know how damn foolish it'd be. It'd be just like it's always been. We wouldn't have a thing on yuh, except your bum rep. I guess all we can do is to ask you to come down to headquarters and make a statement."

Sardi smiled appreciatively. "I only wish you knew how sorry I am that such a thing has happened."

O'Rourke nodded sullenly and walked over to the dead man for a last look. He grasped the boy's shoulders firmly and rolled him over on his back. Fine's jaw dropped. A dried, red thread of blood snaked down the side of his face from a head wound. His eyes were glassy, unseeing.

O'Rourke arose slowly and faced the porcine gangster. "You say the room was dark, and that you wouldn't have shot him if you could have seen who it was?" he asked casually.

A faint trace of worry spread over Sardi's face. "That's what I said," he admitted. "You might think I'm tough, but killing people ain't exactly my idea of an after-dinner sport."

O'Rourke turned as if to go, but just as he reached the door he stopped, and, pulling a three-celled flashlight from his hip pocket, he walked back toward Sardi and flashed the light full in his eyes.

Sardi started in surprise.

"Don't be afraid, it's just a gag of mine," O'Rourke explained quickly. "I like to watch how the pupils of the eyes contract when you shine a light in them."

Sardi scratched the back of his head. "Are you nuts?" he snapped. "What in hell are you talking about?"

O'Rourke disregarded the gangster's query. "Put the cuffs on him, boys!" he commanded. Then: "I'm arresting you for the murder of Joey Fine. And if you want to know why, just take a look at his eyes. Once a person dies, they never change, and his contracted pupils show this room was as light as day when you shot him!"

The firm of Alfred A. Knopf has never attempted to develop an extensive detective-story list — like Doubleday's Crime Club or Simon & Schuster's Inner Sanctum. Yet Knopf publishes a Big Three of its own in the mystery field. First, of course, there is the one and only Dashiell Hammett who founded a detectival dynasty; next, there is Raymond Chandler who is the Prince of Tales in the hierarchy of the hardboiled. But it is becoming more and more apparent that Knopf's King and Crown Prince have virtually abdicated: Hammett is resting on his laurels — and three weekly radio shows; Chandler is hibernating in the venial vineyards of Hollywood. That elevates the third member of Knopf's Big Three to the current Number One spot — George Harmon Coxe now carries the manhunting mail for the firm of Knopf. Not that Mr. Coxe is a 100 per cent, full-blooded practitioner of the guts-gore-and-gals style of gumshoeing, or an irreconcilable devotee of violence and gunplay: he can be terse and hard when he elects to, but glory be, he can also temper his toughness with the welcome relief of warmth and humanity. None of Mr. Coxe's short stories reveal this unspectacular, but truer, realism more than the series he has woven around the character of a metropolitan medical examiner. Here is one of the finest yarns in the growing saga of Dr. Paul Standish.

DEATH CERTIFICATE

by GEORGE HARMON COXE

IN THE two years that Dr. Paul Standish had acted as the city's medical examiner he had become acquainted with death in nearly all its violent forms, but not until the night Dr. Cheney was found dead had it ever occurred to him that the performance of his duty might some day become a personal matter.

The call from the telegraph bureau awakened him shortly after two thirty that morning. By the time he had dressed, a police car was waiting at the curb, and he rode along deserted pavements to the north side of town near the river. Here, in a street of grimy loft buildings and tenements, another police car had been backed around so that its headlights focused into an alleyway.

One of the officers gathered there spoke to Standish and he answered automatically, having no preparation for what came next, yet knowing in his first glance that the man who lay sprawled on the dusty cobblestones had been murdered. The back of the head was broken and bloody, and because he had become accustomed to approach each case as a diagnostician and view it with a clinical eye, he noticed the nondescript character of

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the worn suit and topcoat, and found them in keeping with the telegraph bureau's announcement. An unidentified man, the bureau had said, and that was what Paul Standish had expected until he turned the body over and realized that this man had once been his friend.

Recognition was swift and left him shaken and sick inside. The night air was suddenly cool and though he heard one of the officers speak, it was some seconds before he could recover from the shock and think reasonably.

"We went through his pockets as well as we could without moving him," the officer said. "Looks like he's clean. We figure some muggers slugged him on the walk and dragged him in here out of sight."

Standish forced himself to concentrate. He made sure about the pockets as he made his preliminary tests for *rigor mortis*. He knew then that there was nothing more to be done here; he knew that insofar as his job was concerned, his work, which was to determine the cause of death, was finished. Yet now, as his thoughts went back to the Dr. Cheney he had known ten years before when he was a young interne at City Hospital, he knew that it was not enough to write a report which said that this same Dr. Cheney had been murdered by a blunt instrument, and he turned to ask whose beat this was.

"Mine, sir," said a uniformed husky. "My flashlight picked him up when I turned it in here at two fifteen on my way down the street."

"Did you turn it in here on your previous round? At what time?"

"One fifteen, sir. And there was no sign of him."

Standish straightened, a moderately tall man with good shoulders and a well-boned face that looked lean and angular in the glare of the headlights. For another moment he stared beyond the body, his eyes obscured and his normally easy mouth a tight grim line; then, speaking quietly, he asked if anyone was here from homicide.

"I am," a voice said. "Sergeant Wargo."

Standish recognized the man as an assistant of Lieutenant Ballard's. He had hoped Ballard would be here; he needed him now but he did not ask about the lieutenant who was his friend. He merely nodded as he heard the ambulance draw to a stop in the street, and asked the sergeant to wait.

Five minutes later, when the body had been removed, they stood on the sidewalk and Wargo, a young man of intelligence and ability who had not yet asked a question nor offered an opinion, said:

"We're pretty sure he was dragged into the alley, Doctor."

"Yes," Standish said. "But he wasn't killed on the sidewalk. He'd been dead at least three hours when I examined him."

Wargo whistled softly. Then, as though held by something in the doctor's manner that he did not understand, he said, "Do you know him?"

Standish nodded and took time to marshal his thoughts, knowing now

that he would not be going back to bed and knowing also that he would need help. "Ballard's not on call?"

"Not tonight," Wargo said. "The captain told him to get some rest because he's been going steadily ever since yesterday morning when Frankie Montanari jumped his bail. So has everybody in the department." Wargo grunted softly. "Even homicide, because I guess they figure when they find Frankie, it'll be a homicide job."

Dr. Standish had no interest in Montanari who had been about to be sentenced for bribery in a gambling case when he disappeared. The newspapers had intimated that the length of the sentence would depend on whether or not Montanari disclosed the real boss of the gambling syndicate that employed him, but Standish felt only annoyance that such a case should rob him of Lieutenant Ballard's help.

"I'm going to the morgue," he said, and then, standing beside the police car, he told Sergeant Wargo what he wanted him to do.

Dr. Cheney had as his office and living quarters the lower floor of a two-family house which stood on the east side of town in a neighborhood no more than a cut or two above the slums. There was a police car out front when Standish arrived and Sergeant Wargo was sitting on the steps waiting for him.

"The guy upstairs owns the place," Wargo said. "I got the key from him. This coupe" — he indicated a battered car in front of the police sedan — "is Doc Cheney's. There's no doctor's bag in it and I didn't find any in the office. You can have a look if you want."

Standish went into a poorly-furnished waiting room overlooking the porch. He inspected the adjoining private office and the living quarters beyond, finding no signs of prosperity and knowing finally that the bag, without which Cheney would never have made a professional call, was not here. Then, because he did not understand this any more than he understood the dead man's empty pockets, he examined the appointment book on the desk.

"He made his last call at five."

"The guy upstairs saw him come in around six," Wargo said. "He thinks he went out around nine."

"What makes him think so?"

"He heard the doorbell ring, heard the doc answer it. He thinks he went out."

It was nearly six o'clock when Paul Standish reached his apartment and though he undressed, he did not go to bed but sat by the window and tried to find some reason for a murder that on the face of it seemed utterly senseless. That it was not his job to do so, did not occur to him at all until Lieutenant Ballard put it into words at eight thirty that morning in his office at police headquarters, when Standish showed up there.

They had worked together often,

these two, though it was generally Ballard who yelled for help and Dr. Standish who maintained it was not his job to do detective work. This time the shoe was on the other foot and though the lieutenant heard him out, he offered no encouragement, nor even agreement with the doctor's theory.

"Sergeant Wargo thinks it was a hold-up job," he said. "And I've got to go along. A couple of young punks jumped Cheney and maybe he gave them an argument and they sapped him — too hard."

"Three hours before he was found?"

"So what? Maybe it happened in their neighborhood and they got scared and went back and moved him. Hell, I can think of a dozen answers to that one."

Standish tried to be patient. "Someone called for Cheney at nine o'clock, otherwise he would have taken his car. He took his bag with him because it wasn't in his office. He's not found until three hours after he's killed and there's no bag, no identification on him. If I hadn't known him, he might have lain in the morgue for days before we knew who he was, and I say that doesn't shape up as a mugging job."

Ballard ran his fingers through his sandy hair and his shrewd gray eyes were troubled. He recognized sound reasoning when he heard it but he was a harried man just now, conscious of pressure from above that demanded he and every man on the force find a missing gambler named Franki Montanari, an assignment which was a little out of his line.

"Look, Paul," he said. "Right now I can't agree with you. I think a couple of thugs did the job and you know how we catch guys like that. We add some men to the district and keep our eyes open and the punks keep trying the same racket until we catch up with them. Before we get through, we'll know what jobs they've pulled. This Cheney thing will turn out to be one of 'em." He took a breath and said, "But even if I'm wrong, what do you want me to do?"

Paul Standish started to speak, then checked his reply when he realized it was inadequate. He took a moment to think, aware that if Ballard was right there was nothing more to be done. But if Ballard was wrong, there could only be one answer: that Cheney had been killed deliberately and for a definite and clear-cut reason.

He wanted to know what that reason was. Like any good diagnostician, he wanted to know why. Yet when he spoke of this, it sounded silly, even to him.

"I want to know why."

Ballard sighed heavily and threw up his hands. "Find Montanari and I'll put twenty men on it. Maybe they can answer you. I can't." He paused, gray eyes half-closed. "Who was this Cheney, a brother of yours or something?"

Mary Hayward asked Paul Standish a similar question at eleven thirty,

after the last of his office patients had been taken care of. Mary, his nurse, secretary and Girl-Friday, had medium-blonde hair and green eyes and a nicely-modeled figure. She was jealous of Standish's time and quite possibly of his affections. She believed he was wasting his talent as medical examiner, arguing that he would be much further ahead if he put this time into his own practice. And because she was young and forthright she spoke not too kindly about Dr. Cheney.

"I can't understand why you bother," she said. "I've heard you speak of him. I thought he was a bum."

Standish eyed her somberly, but because he was used to her ways and understood in some measure what was behind them, he took no offense at her words.

"He was no bum, Mary. He was resident physician at City Hospital when I was interning. He was a very nice guy."

"Ten years ago."

"He was a nice guy today. Weak, maybe. That's the worst you could say about him. You could call him a failure — a lot of people did — but he was a good doctor and I don't believe he ever consciously did a dishonest or unethical thing in his life."

He hesitated, no longer seeing Mary as his mind turned back. Speaking more to himself than to her, he told how Dr. Cheney had left the hospital to give all his time to his own practice and how, the following winter, a truck had skidded out of control and killed his wife and the two-year-old son she had been carrying across the street.

"Some people can take a thing like that and others can't. Cheney couldn't. It took the heart out of him and he closed his office. I don't know what was in his mind or what he wanted to do; I do know that it was the best thing that ever happened to those people in his neighborhood when he turned his back on the society he knew and opened that east side office. He collected enough to live on and if you wanted medical treatment you got it from Cheney no matter who you were."

The quiet sincerity of the young doctor's words impressed the girl and and her eyes were soft and concerned. She said she was sorry, that she hadn't understood, and she remained that way until Standish glanced at his watch and stood up. When he said he was going to the morgue, and from there to the district attorney's office, Mary said:

"Don't forget your two o'clock appointment with Mr. Lane."

Standish frowned. "Cancel it. Call him up and —"

Mary interrupted him, her voice horrified and then indignant. She said that Mr. Lane was rich and that the thorough physical check-up that Standish was to give him would bring more of that kind of business to the office.

Standish was adamant. He said tomorrow or the next day would do just as well, that Mr. Lane would under-

stand if Mary told him the doctor had been called out on an urgent matter.

"Urgent?" Mary was still indignant. She would have argued further if Standish had not opened the door and walked out.

One of the duties of the medical examiner's office was to see that a copy of all autopsy reports was sent to the district attorney and in the case of Dr. Cheney, Paul Standish delivered this report in person.

John Quinn, the district attorney, was in conference when Standish arrived and he had to wait a half-hour in the anteroom before the door finally opened and a thick-bodied, hard-jawed man with small, deep-set eyes and not much hair came out. His name was Mike Darrow and he was still talking.

"I'm getting a little fed up with this," he said to Quinn, who stood in the doorway. "If you want to see me again, you'd better subpoena me. . . Hi, Doc. How's it going?"

Standish stood up, making no reply, and started towards the private office. Quinn followed him in, his face flushed and his eyes angry behind the shell-rimmed glasses. He swore softly a moment before he glanced at the report Standish handed him, finally put his mind on it as the doctor told his story.

Standish knew the news was bad even before he finished. He could see it in Quinn's face and he had to listen while the other spoke of a budget that always kept him short-handed and made him dependent on police efforts.

"What exactly did you have in mind?" he said.

"I don't think Cheney was mugged," Standish said. "And if I'm right there has to be a reason. I thought you might know some things I don't know, that you might think of some reason."

Quinn said he was sorry. He could think of no reason for any deliberate attempt on Dr. Cheney, but maybe Standish could help him. "Where," he said, "would be a good place to hide a body?"

"Montanari's? How do you know he didn't run out on you?"

"I'll tell you," Quinn said, and he did, starting with Mike Darrow and going back to prohibition days when Darrow had been a strong-arm man and hijacker. He enumerated a record of arrests that ranged from extortion to murder, commented profanely on the lack of convictions, and brought the record up to date by explaining the ramifications of Darrow's gambling syndicate, which had branched out into sporting events and made a mistake in trying to bribe certain college basketball players.

"When those kids told their story," Quinn said, "we dug back and found a couple of boxers who sang the same song. Montanari is the lad who offered the bribe and Darrow is his boss, though we can't prove it. And Montanari knew what the score was. I had his wife down. I told her he'd

get only two years if he cooperated and gave us the goods on Darrow, and I promised to put in a word when he came up for parole. I told her he'd go away for ten long years if he refused to tell the truth. And then I got a break."

Quinn leaned across his desk. "His wife is going to have a baby in about six months. She hadn't told Frankie, but she did tell him after I talked to her, because yesterday when he turned up missing she came down here to see me. She said Frankie had promised her he would sing and I think he made the mistake of telling Darrow so." Quinn sat back and said, "That's why we're looking for a body. It's the sort of thing Darrow would do because he knows that Montanari's testimony would put him away for a long, long time."

Quinn stood up and shrugged. "I'm sorry, Doc. I don't know how I can help you. Until we find Frankie I won't even be able to think about anything else."

It was nearly five when Paul Standish returned to his office and Mary Hayward, who was checking records at her desk, took one look at his face and wisely made no comment when he went into his own office and closed the door.

It was, Standish realized as he shed his hat and coat, a mistake to have wasted any time on Quinn. And because he felt tired and beaten, it seemed now that it had been a mistake to concern himself with the Cheney death at all. He had spent hours accomplishing nothing and now he was through; in the future he would confine his efforts to those covered by the statutes governing his office.

At least, that is what he told himself. That is what he thought for a few minutes as he straightened his desk and busied himself with other matters. The trouble was he was a stubborn man when confronted by a problem, medical or otherwise, and his mind kept going back, probing, testing, weighing the bits of information at hand. And finally, not realizing it, he was thinking of Old Doc Lathrop who had given him the job of assistant medical examiner at a time when Standish needed the work to pay his office rent.

It was Lathrop who had told him that through the experience gained by such work he would add to his knowledge as a diagnostician, and as he remembered some of the advice the grand old man had given him, one oft-repeated remark kept coming back. *The truth always rings true.* That was what Lathrop liked to say when faced with a difficult problem, and though it had sounded corny at times, Standish realized that this was all he needed now: The truth.

If Cheney had died at the hands of ordinary thugs, as Ballard maintained, he could be satisfied; if not, he had to know why — he had to know the truth.

He stood up, dark hair tousled and fatigue lining the angles of his eyes.

He walked round the desk and sat down again, lighting a cigarette and then playing absently with his lighter. Just what made him think of Dr. Cheney's missing bag, he did not know but suddenly the idea was there and he reached for his own bag, wondering with new hope if the murder could be traced to something that Cheney had carried.

With his own bag open, he pawed through its familiar contents. He removed the stethoscope and saw the hypodermic kit, and though this gave way to further speculation he continued his search, taking out his pad of prescription blanks and then another, larger pad, his glance inspecting the printed form and then narrowing into a hot bright stare.

For another minute he sat quite motionless, his mind racing; then, not daring to hope that he had an answer, but desperately, like a man grabbing at straws when all else has failed, he sat erect and reached for the telephone.

He got his number without delay, spoke briefly in quick, urgent accents. When he hung up there was new brightness in his eyes and that gleam was still there ten minutes later when he strode down a corridor in the City Hall and opened a door marked Department of Health.

The assistant he had spoken to was waiting behind a counter and as Standish thanked him for keeping the office open, he pushed a slip of paper across the counter which was a duplicate of the form Standish had seen in his bag. Across the top of the form were printed the words: Death Certificate. And this one had been filled out and signed by Dr. Edward Cheney.

"Is there anything wrong?" the assistant asked, held by the intentness of the doctor's inspection.

Standish said no, but he had a pencil out now as his glance took in the details and he wrote down the cause of death as stated by Dr. Cheney. Chronic gastric ulcer, hemorrhage into gastro-intestinal tract, spontaneous, is what Cheney had written, and Standish saw now that the deceased was one Charles Judson and that the certificate was dated the day before yesterday.

He had other questions to ask before he left and then he went out to his car and drove swiftly crosstown to Dr. Cheney's flat, the excitement riding him now in spite of his efforts to hold his hopes in check.

The two-family house looked even more depressing by daylight but Standish found the office unlocked, and the middle-aged woman who had been Cheney's secretary answered his question about Charles Judson and let him inspect Cheney's records. When he saw there was no card for Judson and was sure the secretary had no knowledge of the name, he again turned to the telephone, this time calling Lieutenant Ballard at police headquarters.

"I have a lead on the Cheney murder," he said. "I want to call on a fellow named Earle Jennings." He

mentioned an address and said, "Can you meet me there in ten minutes?"

"No."

"Why not?" Standish said, surprised and a little annoyed at Ballard's curt reply.

"Because I'm up to my ears in this Montanari thing and I've got to go into a meeting with the captain and the commissioner and I don't know how long I'll be. Call me back in an hour."

"An hour?" Standish said, outraged. "An hour?"

And then all the tension and the lack of sleep and the fatigue that he had been battling became too much for him and his normally even disposition dissolved abruptly, leaving his voice irascible and hard. He said he had been working on a murder that was really none of his business since two thirty that morning, and he finally had a lead, and if Ballard didn't want to know about it, it was all right with him. He had no intention of waiting an hour, or even fifteen minutes, and what did Ballard think of *that.*

Ballard finally interrupted him. He said wait a minute and to take it easy. "What makes this Jennings guy important?" he said. "Who is he, anyway?"

"He's an undertaker," Standish said, and hung up.

By the time he had parked his car and walked along the street to the colored, opaque window bearing the inscription, *Earle Jennings — Funeral Director,* Paul Standish was ashamed of his outburst and no longer so sure that his hunch was right. He stood for a moment looking at the narrow-front shop, sandwiched in between a stationery store and a bakery, aware that this was a run-down neighborhood, and tempted to go on by; that he did not was due not only to pride and native stubbornness but also to a well-entrenched and ever-present desire to know the truth.

Having come this far, he could not quit, and so he opened the door and stepped into a long, narrow room with somber walls, wicker furniture, and a threadbare rug. At the far end, near a curtained doorway, was a desk, but there was no one in the room so he walked on, past the desk, parting the curtains and finding himself in a short hall leading to a room in the back. As he stepped into this room, the man working over the casket heard him and wheeled.

A somberly-dressed, shifty-eyed man, as tall as Standish but thinner, he had a heavy screw-driver in his hand and his glance was both startled and apprehensive.

"What's the idea?" he said.

"Are you Earle Jennings?"

"Yeah, why?"

"The Department of Health issued you a burial permit for a man named Charles Judson."

"Sure." There was defiance in the voice now but the eyes remained shifty. "We buried him this afternoon."

"Did you?" Standish glanced

about, aware that the room was a sort of display room and noting the open doorway leading to the preparation room beyond. He moved slowly then, up to the table supporting the casket, then reaching for a handle and testing its weight. "I doubt it," he said. "Open this up and let's see."

Jennings swore viciously. He demanded to know who Standish was and when he found out, there was fear in his glance. He tried to bluster and when Standish started for him, he backed away, his manner changing.

"All right, Doc," he said. "You're off the beam but if you want to look, okay." He stepped up to the casket, unfastened the catches, and lifted the lid. As he moved aside, Standish took a quick look, then stopped to stare.

For there was a dead man inside the cheap, shallow box — a thin, almost undersized man. His name was Frankie Montanari and as Standish leaned forward he saw the bullet hole in the side of the head just above the hairline.

But even as he noticed this, he knew he had made a mistake. Sheer surprise had already robbed him of a vital second or two, and then it was too late. He tried to duck, sensing rather than hearing the sudden movement behind him, but even as he moved something smashed solidly in back of his head and pain exploded inside his brain.

The floor heaved and the room spun about him. He went down slowly, dizzily. He was on his knees. Then Jennings was tugging at him and he was helpless to resist the pressure that dragged him across the floor until vaguely, as from a great distance, he heard a door slam and blackness engulfed him.

Never quite losing consciousness, it took Paul Standish a while to find the strength to stand. By that time he knew he had been locked in some closet, and though he hurled himself at the door he had little room and could not get enough momentum in his charge to do any good.

Realizing finally that he could not break out alone, he began to think, and presently the pattern of Dr. Cheney's murder became clear. He knew now what had happened, and why. He also knew about what to expect and was ready for it when the door opened a few minutes later and he stepped out to find Mike Darrow standing there, a gun in his hand, Jennings beside him.

Darrow's blocky face was grim and uncompromising. "You had to stick your nose in, huh?" he said flatly.

Standish glanced about, weighing his chances and not liking the odds, knowing now that the district attorney's guess had been right when he said Montanari had made the mistake of going to Darrow.

"Frankie came to see you," Standish said. "To tell you he was going to talk."

"With a gun in his pocket," Darrow said. "This gun." He gestured with the automatic in his hand and laughed abruptly, an unpleasant sound. "I took it away from him."

"And after you'd shot him, you were stuck. It was a murder you hadn't planned. You had no alibi, and a body to get rid of, and you thought of a way." Standish hesitated, his bitterness at Darrow's cleverness erasing any immediate fear for himself. "You needed a death certificate and that meant a doctor, preferably a poor one, without a family. Someone crooked if possible — like Cheney."

He took a breath and said, "But Cheney was no crook. You found that out and you knew, once you'd tipped your hand, that you'd have to kill him. But that didn't matter to you because you'd already killed once and had no further penalty to pay. I guess Cheney knew, too."

He paused again, his bitterness festering as he realized what must have happened to the man who had once been his friend. Cheney had to sign or be killed, and even if he signed he must have known that his chance of survival was slim. But he had taken that chance because it was all he had, and in doing so had left behind one clue for whoever might be curious enough to make a search for it.

"The first certificate he made out," Darrow said, "he put down some funny words as the cause of death. I was afraid he was trying to tip off the health department. I made him write out another with words I could understand. What put you wise?"

"What difference does it make?"

"None." Darrow flattened his lips and his little eyes were implacable. "Tomorrow morning Frankie gets buried as Charles Judson and nobody's ever going to know what happened to him. Only now we need a deeper casket, Doc. To hold you too."

He spoke over his shoulder to Jennings but Standish did not hear him. His lean face was shiny with perspiration and his hands were damp. As he tried to think of some way out, he saw Jennings leave the room and come back lugging two saw-horses; then Darrow was prodding him with the gun, directing him through the preparation room to the storeroom in the back, forcing him to lift one end of a deeper casket while Jennings took the other.

Standish did not notice the weight of this burden; he was thinking about Ballard. He knew Darrow would not get away with his plan, since Ballard knew that Standish had come to see Jennings. When Standish turned up missing, Ballard would move in and eventually find out what had happened; but he could not expect Darrow to believe it.

Nevertheless, he tried. As they trudged back into the second room, he had his say and Darrow laughed at him, and now he knew that no matter what happened, he had to put up a fight, and quickly, before time ran out on him. Having nothing further to lose, the problem became simply a question of method, and he wasted no time feeling sorry for himself.

For they were putting the casket on the saw-horses now, he and Jennings, and Darrow was on the other

side, and suddenly Standish's nerves were quiet and he knew what to do.

Feeling poised and ready now, not watching Darrow, he wedged his thigh under the edge of the casket as Jennings tried to adjust it and then, in one continuous movement, heaved mightily, tipping it towards Darrow.

What happened then took no more than a brief second, but to Paul Standish each detail was clear-cut and exact. He heard Jennings yell as the casket teetered and started to fall. He saw the gun flash and heard it hammer twice as Darrow fired wildly in his belated effort to jump clear; then the casket crashed and the floor shook, and above it all came Darrow's scream as his leg snapped under the casket.

After that, things were a little hazy for Paul Standish. He remembered seeing the automatic spin from Darrow's hand; he saw Jennings dive for it. He scrambled over the casket, aware that Jennings would reach it first but hoping he could get close. He watched the man scoop it up and straighten, knowing as it leveled that he would not be in time.

He saw the scared white face behind it and, still moving, watched the trigger finger tighten. Then the gun thundered and only when he saw Jennings's torso jerk did he realize that it was not this gun that had fired.

He stopped short then, hearing Darrow's moans, and he grabbed the gun from limp fingers as Jennings started to sag. Then he turned, unbelieving, and found Sergeant Wargo in the doorway to the hall, a short-barreled service revolver in his hand.

Jennings crumpled a joint at a time and fell over on his face. Darrow stopped groaning and the room was suddenly still. Wargo moved up, lowering his gun. He walked past Standish to glance at Darrow, who had fainted, and then at Montanari's casket.

Standish realized he was holding his breath and let it out, a little surprised that he could still move. He started to speak and had to clear his throat before any words came out. When he started to hand Wargo the automatic, he saw that his hands were trembling, and an odd weakness crept up the back of his legs as reaction hit him.

"Where," he said finally, "did you come from?"

"I was outside." Wargo motioned Standish to help him lift the casket from Darrow's leg. "This guy's going to the chair with one leg shorter than the other," he said and then, continuing with his answer, he added, "Ballard said the way you talked to him over the phone anything might happen and I'd better come out here and keep an eye on you. When I saw Mike come in, I thought I'd better have a look."

Lieutenant Ballard got the rest of the story a half-hour later, after Mike Darrow had been shipped to the hospital and Jennings had been removed. And because he was still shocked by what might have happened to his friend, his remarks were pointed and profane until he thought of some-

thing else; then he shrugged.

"What the hell," he said. "What am I crabbing about? We got Montanari and Darrow, and we know you were right about Doc Cheney. You got a good scare, and it served you right for not telling me the truth over the phone."

"I didn't know then," Standish said. "I didn't know I was going to find Montanari in the casket. All I knew was that Cheney would never have signed that death certificate of his own free will."

Ballard frowned, not understanding. He wanted to know why not. "Don't people die from ulcers and hemorrhages?"

"Certainly. There was nothing wrong with the wording."

"Then what tipped you off?"

Standish took his time because he wanted to make things clear. "Look," he said. "The law says that when a man dies suddenly, the death certificate must be signed by the medical examiner — unless there is a doctor in attendance who is familiar with the case. The law reads something like this: *Attending physicians will certify only to such deaths as those of persons to whom they have given bedside care during the last illness*, etcetera."

"I still don't get it," Ballard said.

"The death certificate said the hemorrhage was spontaneous. And due to chronic gastric ulcers. A physician *who had just been called in* could not know of that condition; he would have to be familiar with a case to make any such diagnosis."

"So —"

"So when I read that, I went to Doc Cheney's place and examined his records. He never had a patient named Judson, never called on one. If he *had* been called in and if there *had* been a man named Judson, and Cheney *had* found him dying, he would not have signed a death certificate. It would have been unethical and illegal."

Standish tipped one hand, let it fall. "And so I knew that the only way anyone could make Cheney sign such a certificate was by force. Because he was that kind of man. I don't believe he ever did a dishonest thing in his life, and he always did the best he could to make the truth ring true."

Ballard looked at Paul Standish and deep down in his eyes there was respect and approval. He seemed about to say something, checked himself. He took the doctor's arm and turned him towards the door.

"When you have faith in a guy," he said, under his breath, "you go all the way, don't you?"

Standish heard only part of Ballard's words and he was too tired to pay much attention to those. He wanted mostly a drink and something to eat. "What?" he said.

"Nothing," Ballard said. "Let's go see that good-looking secretary of yours that's always bawling you out. I've got an idea she's going to be sort of proud of you. Are you buying the drinks or am I?"

Standish said it did not matter. He said either way was all right so long as they drank first to Dr. Cheney.

UP THE RIVER

by SIDNEY S. LENZ

JOHN HALL was peeved, and he didn't care one particle how much he showed it. Obliged to leave for Albany on a few hours' notice was bad enough; but why couldn't it have been yesterday — or tomorrow — instead of the only day that he wanted to be in New York, for good and sufficient reasons?

Then, as usual, everything had gone wrong. The waiting-line at the ticket window had been endlessly long. The Pullman ticket man had had no space to allot at the last minute. The parlor-car chart was in charge of the conductor on the train. And when the conductor was approached, he said with scant courtesy:

"Nothing doing, captain. Not a seat left."

Hall was a typical New Yorker, and looked it. Whatever he did, he did well. A desirable partner to have in a foursome, whether at golf or bridge. Always immaculately groomed, from the crease in his trousers to the black pearl in his cravat. Scarf-pins might be archaic now, but forty years ago his mother had presented it to him on his twenty-first birthday, and it was the one piece of jewelry that he prized.

Few men named John get very far along in years before they are "Jack" to their friends. A Jack may be 99 44/100% pure; but, oddly enough, all Johns are squareshooters. Hall had always been called John.

The day coach was impossible — hot, sticky, and with two sets of bawling children. One set would have been bad enough!

Hall sauntered along to the smoking car, and stopped at a spot that appeared as if it might be a haven of rest for his weary soul.

Two men were seated alongside a board that was a makeshift for a card table. The man at the window was deeply ensconced in the arms of Morpheus. He was large, with heavy features, and looked like a pretty tough customer, Hall decided.

The chap seated beside him was playing solitaire. He was tall and thin with dark, sad eyes. Honesty was depicted in each of the many lines on his face. No question about this fellow, thought Hall. He could pass for Honest Abe, the great emancipator, reincarnated. Hall prided himself on his ability to read character, and he rarely strayed far from the mark.

"Is this seat engaged?" asked Hall. He knew it wasn't, and if he was unwelcome, he would wander along.

The man with the cards glanced up, barely smiled, and without a word, went back to his game. Hall sat down.

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The man gathered up the cards in his left hand, fumbled them a bit, and dealt out four heaps of five cards each.

"Three," he muttered to himself, and piled them together.

"That's a funny solitaire," remarked Hall. "Looks almost as if you were doing a bridge problem."

Honest Abe smiled, and said laconically, "Right."

It ran through Hall's mind that this man was the very last person in the world he would have expected to be a bridge player.

The cards were again distributed into four piles, and carefully scrutinized.

"What's the idea?" inquired Hall.

"Bridge solitaire," replied Abe. "You see, I lay out hands of five or six cards, and try to make all the tricks I can. I play South, and one day make Spades trump, and the next day I play another suit. Today it's no trumps. Now this hand looks to be good for four tricks; but a careful player should make five."

He gathered up the cards before Hall could see where the fifth trick was coming from, and he had his doubts. The cards were squared up and rapidly cut, with the use of only one hand.

By the shades of Nate Leipsig, Howard Thurston and Fred Keating, it was the *Charlier Pass!*

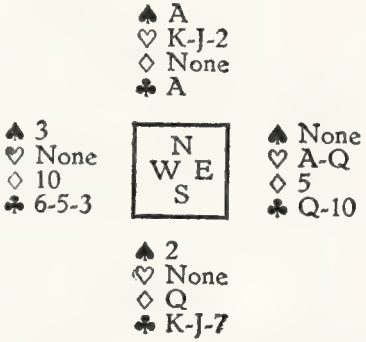
Again the one-hand layout in heaps of five, his right hand being hidden underneath the table. Maybe he was crippled, mused Hall.

"It is funny," said Abe, "how the beginner will lose a trick or two on nearly every hand. They don't look ahead. Now there are four tricks in this, and lots of players would only get three." He started to take up the cards.

"Just a moment," requested Hall. "Maybe I'm thick, but I can't see more than three against the best play. Let me look at it."

"Sure," said Abe, as he picked a piece of thread off his sleeve, and blew it away.

Hall placed the South hand in front and the others in their relative positions. This was the distribution of the cards:



Playing at No Trump, South could take all five tricks, provided he could get back to his hand, after North took the Ace of Clubs. But how to get back? East would take his two Hearts as soon as North led them.

"Guess you flopped on this one, brother," said Hall. "Bet you ten dollars you can't take four tricks against my play."

Abe didn't reply for a minute. He absent-mindedly removed the thread which had now settled on the lapel of Hall's coat.

"Watch out," laughed Hall. "I'm a pretty good player."

"I'll take you," said Abe. "Better look 'em over again and call off the bet."

"No thanks, brother," Hall answered. (When he liked a man, he always called him brother.) "I'm waiting to be shown."

Editor's Note: Why not try to solve the bridge problem before finishing the story? It's a honey!

Abe led the Diamond, and discarded the Ace of Spades. Hall followed suit from both hands. Abe played the Spade, which forced Hall in the lead with the three, and North now threw away the Ace of Clubs. West had nothing left to lead but Clubs and East's protection in that suit was under the hammer.

The only possible way of making four tricks was to throw away the two Aces!

"Well, I'll be jiggered," cried Hall. "You certainly . . ."

"Ossining," called the conductor, as the train slowed down. The big man at the window woke with a jerk. As he rose from his seat, his left hand appeared — manacled to Abe's right hand.

Hall, his wallet open, looked aghast. The detective glanced at the cards and money. He sensed something.

"Did you let the Black Crook gyp you?" he asked, with a broad grin. "He's the slickest operator in the game; but he's going out of circulation now for a couple of years. Put your money away, you don't have to pay him; he's never given a guy a break."

Hall hesitated but, on second thought, held out the bill. "Here you are, broth —" He stopped.

Abe smilingly shook his head.

"I lost it squarely," remonstrated Hall. "It's your money, and you are welcome to it. Take it and so long — *brother.*"

For the first time Abe looked Hall straight in the eye.

"I'll take it, because I need it bad," he said. "Thanks." He stooped to pick up an envelope from the floor. Taking a pencil stub from his pocket, he scribbled something on one of the playing cards and placed it in the envelope. This he handed to Hall, saying simply:

"It's my receipt."

The train pulled out. Hall smiled as he looked out of the window. He pulled down his waistcoat and adjusted his tie. His hand rested on his cravat with a bit of a shock. The black pearl was missing!

A quizzical expression flitted across his features as he toyed with the envelope — Abe's receipt. Slowly he opened the envelope and extracted his pearl pin and the ten dollar bill.

First Prize Winner in EQMM's Third Cover Contest

OBSERVATION

by ROBERT WEINSTEIN

THEY promoted this young cop, Ed McGrath, to Detective Second Grade for shooting up two citizens who were casually robbing a restaurant, and naturally they team him up with an experienced detective like me, Patrick McGillicuddy. If I do say so myself, there's nobody in the department that could teach him better.

The lad reported and a fine figure he is, indeed. Big as a basketball player, wide at the shoulders, and an Irish grin from here to there. I was thinking that one day I'd be bringing him home to meet me darling daughter, Mary . . .

"Eddie," I advised him, "the most important thing to a detective is observation. Keep your eyes and ears open. Look and listen for the little things and the big things will take care of themselves."

"O.K., Pop," Ed grins, "I gotcha. Observation."

That being settled, we spent the morning discussing the merits of certain racing steeds, and I must admit that Eddie is a very fine listener. But at 11:30 we get a rush call. Murder.

A whole swarm of us descended on this private home in the fashionable section of the city and it takes only a glance to see that a queer murder has been done. The body of a slim young woman is sprawled on the carpet, a dart still sticking upright at the base of her tight green sweater. A white handkerchief blindfold was tied on her head.

Lt. Kennedy was in charge and the place swarmed with photogs, medics, coroners and the like, but all we established was that the woman was dead and that the poisoned dart had killed her.

The dead woman's husband, Leonard DeMar, gave us the fill-in. He was an elderly, broker type, and the shock had left him in bad shape. The tears streamed down his cheeks as he sobbed, "Alice and I invited our friends to a little gathering. When

things were dull, somebody suggested playing charades."

The lieutenant looked puzzled.

DeMar explained. "It's a game. One person strikes a pose and the others must guess what the pose represents. Poor Alice was 'It' and we all turned our backs. Suddenly she moaned and we turned around to find her lying on the floor."

The lieutenant does a lot of questioning, blustering, and bluffing, but he gets nowhere. The guests were three neighboring couples, and there wasn't anything to indicate that one of them was the killer. I sure hate these refined murders where you've got to think.

The lieutenant calls us into another room and says, "We need speed. We've got the killer among those seven people, and now's the time to break him or her down. Any ideas?"

There is some shuffling of flat feet, then Eddie whispers in my ear and I ask the lieutenant, "Can I question the husband again for a minute, lieutenant?"

The lieutenant has never appreciated my talents, but he growls, "All right, McGillicuddy."

DeMar is still shedding tears as we lead him to an anteroom. Eddie does the questioning, as I want him to get the experience. Eddie says, "What kind of charades were you playing? Famous people, book titles, or what?"

"Statues," replied DeMar, wiping the tears away with his hand.

Eddie nodded. "Somebody performed 'The Thinker' and 'Diana the Huntress' and 'The Statue of Liberty?' They always do."

"Yes, all those," sobbed the weeping man, "and 'Justice' and 'The Discus Thrower,' too."

Eddie patted the man's shoulder gently. "Mr. DeMar, you can cut out the act."

I started to reproach the kid, because that was no way to treat a bereaved man, but Eddie waved me off.

"You did it," he insisted. "Now that we know, we can trace the poison and the dart, and we're sure to find the motive. Why not tell us and give yourself a break? It was another man, wasn't it?"

DeMar seemed relieved. "I don't know how you knew," he shrugged. "Yes, I killed her. I had to. She was running around with other men and threatening to divorce me. I couldn't stand that so when the chance came along —"

Eddie grinned and said, "He's all yours, Pop," but of course I knew it was DeMar all the time so I called in the lieutenant and he wrapped it up. I didn't mention Eddie's part because I didn't want the kid to get a swelled head, even if he was a big help.

Eddie and I drove off in a squad car and after a while I said, "That sure was easy, wasn't it?"

"Sure was," Eddie agreed.

I coughed.

Eddie went on, "I noticed that the dead woman was wearing a bright red dress, a very tight green sweater, and

very high-heeled shoes. She was too flashy, too sexy, for that neighborhood, so I figured she and her husband were having troubles."

"Look," I snorted, "You can't figure a guy to kill his wife, just by her clothes."

"You said to watch the little things," added Eddie. "DeMar wailed like a banshee and kept wiping the tears away with his hands. Why? Because he had no handkerchief. You see, she was using *his* handkerchief, because no woman's handkerchief is big enough to use as a blindfold."

"That's something," I admitted. "But still, many a wife borrows her husband's handkerchief."

Eddie grinned. "In charades a pose is used only once. I deduced from the blindfold that Mrs. DeMar had posed as the statue of 'Justice.' Now when was Mrs. DeMar killed? Obviously, Pop, while everybody had their backs turned — everybody but the murderer. Since Mrs. DeMar was already lying on the carpet dead when the others turned around, only the murderer could have *seen* her posing as 'Justice.' But who knew that 'Justice' had been posed? Only her husband. Just like you said, Pop — observation."

Honorable Mentions

Right There by Lela C. Scholl, Nashville, Indiana
Everything Covered by Harry M. Ware, Las Vegas, Nevada
Murder Is Not Child's Play by Fannie Mandelbaum, Denver, Colorado
Christmas Cheer and the End of It by Neal Smith, Berkeley, California

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Hughes Allison is the first Negro detective-story writer to have his work appear in EQMM. He was born in Greenville, South Carolina, on March 29, 1908. At the time his father was a state office Superintendent for the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, the world's oldest and largest Negro business organization; his mother was a teacher, and later the principal, in Greenville's Presbyterian parochial school. Both parents were college graduates. Mr. Allison's maternal grandfather had been a South Carolina magistrate, one of the nation's first Negro judges. Just prior to World War I, the author's mother was one of sixty Negro women who were trained by the Federal Government at Hampton Institute to do propaganda work. In 1919 the family moved to Newark, New Jersey, where Mr. Allison's father continued his work with insurance companies and his mother became the Executive Secretary of the Sojourner Truth Branch, YWCA. The author attended Bergen Street Grammar School, then Barringer High School in Newark, and Upsala College in East Orange, New Jersey. In 1932 Hughes Allison started his writing career by becoming the "ghost writer" of half a dozen now-forgotten novels. His first short story was published in "Challenge Magazine" in 1935. About this time he met the late William Jourdan Rapp, worked for him, and learned to write radio scripts.*

In 1937 the Federal Theatre produced Mr. Allison's first play, "The Trial of Dr. Beck." It was the first Federal Theatre production to be brought from outside of New York to Broadway, following Orson Welles's production of "Dr. Faustus" into the Maxine Elliott Theatre; it was the only play written by a Negro which the Federal Theatre produced on Broadway; and it was the first play in which the present stage-screen-and-radio star, William Bendix, had a Broadway role.

Since then Mr. Allison has written for the National Service Bureau, the New Jersey Writers' Project, and the New Jersey WPA Information Service Bureau. In 1941 another play, "Midnight Over Newark," was produced at the Mosque Theatre in Newark and so dramatically publicized the absence of Negro doctors and nurses in Newark's City Hospital that there are Negro physicians and nurses there now.

Mr. Allison is married. His wife, Elitea Bulkley Allison, is a Senior Children's Librarian in the Newark Public Library.

ABOUT THE STORY: "*Corollary*" *won an Honorable Mention in EQMM's Third Annual Contest. It is a story that just had to be written and just had to be published. The protagonist is a Negro detective named Joe Hill and to the best of your Editor's knowledge, this is the first attempt — at long last — to do a serious and sincere job of putting a Negro detective on paper*

realistically. This is the first attempt to project in words a Negro detective who is a character rather than a caricature. Mr. Allison wrote your Editor an 8-page letter discussing his aims and future plans. We wish space limitations did not prevent our quoting the letter in full, but we will give you parts of it now, and perhaps additional excerpts later, if other adventures of Joe Hill appear in EQMM.

"The first story about Joe Hill," explains Mr. Allison, "is meant to be a tiny fragment among an infinitesimal number of fragments incident to reassembling a huge and important picture. A long time ago that particular picture was mutilated and torn out of its frame; it was placed thereafter in the darkest and yet the most costly room of a great museum. . . . The museum has a name: America. The picture also has a name: Negro."

Further in his letter, Mr. Allison asks an extremely interesting question: "Could tough, hardboiled Sam Spade or suave, gentlemanly Ellery Queen enter that dark, costly museum-room and single out the culprits? While it's quite possible they could, it's improbable they really would. For neither Sam Spade nor Ellery Queen is equipped to think with his skin. Moreover, merely apprehending the room's culprits is not the most important factor involved."

Now you understand more clearly what we meant when we said that this story just had to be written and just had to be published.

COROLLARY

by HUGHES ALLISON

Joe Hill should have been assigned to the case three months before its bolder principals accidentally tangled with a radio patrol car and were arrested that Wednesday morning in Oldhaven. But neither Inspector Duffy nor Chief Richard Belden had ordered Joe assigned to the case in the beginning. By that Wednesday it was late. Already a pernicious web — fashioned out of mutilation, terror, and indecision — had begun to coil itself around four unsuspecting persons: a pair of stupid, elderly grandparents; an alert but inexperienced child; and a sincere, though too-exacting, schoolteacher.

It was late Wednesday afternoon, a few hours after the arrests had been announced in the public press, that Joe was finally summoned to the Chief's third-floor office.

Belden, seated behind his desk, was in high humor. "Huh!" he growled. "One guess! What's in the cell block?"

Joe grinned, "The cure for a three months' headache."

"Right! But they're punks," Bel-

den declared. "I've had a good look at 'em. And only one thing the papers have said in the last three months really fits."

"What's that, Chief?" Joe asked.

"Their handle — 'the Bandit Quintet.'"

"The Chief means," Inspector Duffy explained, "we've caught ourselves five yellow jerks with a yen to sing."

Joe said, "With or without persuasion?"

"Without," Duffy replied. "And plenty loud, in a good key, for as long as we want."

Belden said, "I've been a cop for a long time. So I've seen lots of talkers. I don't pretend to know what makes 'em do it. But I do know how to handle 'em. Treat 'em easy, take your time, let 'em spout — and comb every bit of what comes out for leads."

"That's the play all the way," Duffy agreed.

"Not a single one of this Quintet gang seems to have a previous record," the Chief said. "That may be why our stools failed to produce. But just the same. Dig — easy and gently — for crook connections. Lots of cases are still wide-open. Joe, you draw the chauffeur. Says his name is Albert Johnson. Claims he's a powerful church-going fellow. Still, he — watch him, huh?"

"I'll watch him," Joe promised.

Duffy said, "How about the men to work with Hill, Chief?"

One of the telephones on Belden's desk jangled.

"Give him boys with Middle Ward experience," Belden said. Picking up the 'phone, he growled, "Yes?"

In an aside to Joe, Duffy said, "Make it Shaw from Homicide, Carlton from the Bandit Squad —"

Chuckling at the 'phone, Belden told it, "Sure. Put *him* on."

"— Swenson from Auto —" Duffy continued.

"Ah! Mr. Prosecutor!" Belden exclaimed at the 'phone.

"— and Goldberg from Identification," Duffy concluded, matching the grin on Belden's face.

"We're happy as kids about it!" Belden told the 'phone. "Right this minute Detective Hill's on his way to the cell block for a session with their chauffeur."

Joe looked at Duffy.

"Take a peep at all five of 'em," the Inspector told him. "Skip the murders for the time being. Just touch your man for the over-all number of stick-ups. Then come back here."

Joe had seen the same kind of scared, repentant men before. They were in separate cells. Four were pale-faced nonentities who stared at him as he slowly walked past their barred cages, out of solemn eyes that begged for pity. The fifth man — the chauffeur — was exactly like his confederates. Except that his skin was black.

Stepping close to the bars, Joe said, "I'm Detective Hill."

A trace of surprise showed through the worry, shame, and fear etched in the ebony face.

"I knowed," the chauffeur said, "a few of our folks in Oldhaven was cops. But I thought they was all just street cops."

Joe said, "They tell me you're in a little trouble, Johnson."

The man nodded. "Th' Chief — he come to see me. I said I'd talk."

"Chief Belden's not a bad fellow to talk to."

"I seen you now. So — Well, our people is always so far behind. I was just trying to — to catch up a little bit."

"No regular work?"

"I had been chauffeuring for a rich woman — named Mrs. Stevens. But th' job — it was running out. And I met them other four."

Joe smiled encouragingly. "Yes. The others."

"You see — it was like this," the chauffeur said. "Mrs. Stevens — she's a very old lady. She got sick. Before she let 'em take her to th' hospital, she said to me, 'Albert, you've been with me such a short time; I didn't make the same provisions for you. Because you're still young and healthy.' Well, that made me —"

Joe interrupted. "Ever pull a hold-up all by yourself?"

"Naw sir! Only with them other four."

"How many jobs did you do?"

"We done — lemme figure. Yeah. Twenty. And I just driv th' car. That's all I done. Ever!"

Backing away from the bars, Joe said, "Johnson, we'll talk again — in a little while. Huh?"

A talker, it would be a long time before the chauffeur's confessional jag wore off. Joe left the cell block.

When he reentered the office, the Chief was still on the 'phone with the Prosecutor. But joy had vanished. Belden was in a rage, shouting, "Yes, I said th' punks would talk! But they've been on a three months stick-up spree. So how'n hell can we feel 'em for leads if we rush 'em off to that alley-house office you run?"

As the Chief paused, Duffy told Joe, "That Prosecutor's loaded with a tom-cat's nerve. He's pushing us to arraign these five bums — like we'd jugged 'em for loitering!"

"Huh!" Belden yelled at the 'phone. "I don't have the men to do it that quick. You said *Monday* morning first. Now you switch it to *Saturday* morning — so they'll be in court *by* Monday!"

"He's crazy!" Duffy said.

"You're crazy!" Belden said. "But I'll do it! Now get th' hell off my line!" He jammed the 'phone in its cradle with a bang.

"Try to be nice to some people!" Duffy said. "Try it!"

"Lowell will do anything to be Governor!" Belden said. "He's after headlines. No skin off *his* political beak if *we* mess it up."

Duffy said, "Well, we just got to try and deliver —"

"You listen!" Belden interrupted. "I want the last scrap of information pumped out of that mob. By Saturday morning too! See?"

Duffy said, "Yes, sir."

"You'll proceed from the first to the last stick-up. And —"

"In *that* order?" Duffy asked, interrupting.

"Huh! We're only the police!" Belden said. "Will a spread in Sunday's papers land us in the Governor's mansion?"

Duffy said, "Oh! *Lowell* wants it that way."

"Huh! So no sleep for the men you put on it till it's all tied and wrapped up. Understand?"

Homicide's Shaw, Bandit's Carlton, Auto's Swenson, and Identification's Goldberg — the men Inspector Duffy had named to work with Joe in connection with processing the Quintet chauffeur for arraignment — were agreed that meeting the Prosecutor's deadline was one thing. It was another thing, they said, not to miss an important lead in the insane race to beat the exacting hands of the Prosecutor's arbitrary watch. Something would go wrong.

Four other crews — each a duplicate in unit composition — stood with Joe and his particular colleagues and listened grimly to Duffy's procedural instructions.

"Yes, you gotta finish this job by Saturday morning," the Inspector said. "And if you think you can skip being thorough, think some more. See? Comb every word these punks speak, run down every name, every place they mention. For leads. Lots of cases are still wide-open. At all times," he continued, "keep our five guests separated. Be informal, gentle, sympathetic. They'll cooperate. First, let 'em spill their guts. Then ease 'em into handing you the date and location of their first robbery. Clear that with me, so that all of you will be certain about that point. Same procedure with murder. Next, get the over-all number of jobs they did together. Then work forward. Get the relevant, material details of each successive crime: hold-up and/or robbery-murder. End with the last stick-up. See?"

The processing began at seven o'clock Wednesday night.

The chauffeur insisted upon addressing himself only to Joe, who had to carry the interview. But there were no pointed questions during this stage of the game. Johnson just rambled, naming personalities, places, continuity, and chronology. Goldberg jotted down the man's more pertinent statements. At 11 P.M. Joe went to Duffy, told him the culprit's recollection of the first robbery's date and location.

"He still maintains," Joe added, "there were twenty jobs in all."

"Those three points — date, location, total jobs — check."

"Five murders. They occurred during the sixth, eighth, tenth, fifteenth, and eighteenth robberies."

"That checks. What about the car?" Duffy said.

"Just one. Belonged to his employer, Mrs. Stevens. She's in Wildwood Hospital — an incurable, he says."

"I'll check on her."

Joe said, "Before each job he'd steal a set of license plates and substitute them for the set registered in the Stevens name."

"Swenson from Auto will check that. After each job the boys looked for him down in the Middle Ward. How come they missed him?"

"When Mrs. Stevens had to go to the hospital, she told him he could use a room in her apartment."

"He'd hole-up there after a job. What about his dough?"

"He says he put most of it in the Oldhaven Merchants' Bank."

"An original stash for hold-up money. Check the bank first thing in the morning. Where'd he spend the rest?"

"Says he gave some to his church."

"Forget it. Where else?"

"Girls. Goldberg has their names. He'd pick 'em up in the Mattox Hotel, a place run by a woman named Big Rose."

"Goldberg is Identification. I'll have him check the women for records and send Shaw to check the hotel. That's a Middle Ward dump, Joe. Too bad we couldn't spare you when this case first got going. Ten to one, you'd have done what the other boys' faces didn't let them do — pick up Johnson's trail. Maybe you'd have run into him there — at the Mattox — before all the killings started."

Joe said, "Water over the dam now."

"Yeah. I'm going to have Carlton round up witnesses. Need 'em for line-ups. You check his room in the Stevens place. Take a squad car. Collect his clothes."

When Joe returned to Headquarters, after a look at the Stevens apartment, he had the chauffeur identify the particular garments he had worn during the commission of each crime; each piece of apparel was then labeled with a date, time-notation, and a stated location. Next, Joe turned his attention to a long stream of witnesses who viewed the Bandit Quintet in intermittent line-ups. He visited the bank, made notes on deposits and withdrawals.

Late Thursday afternoon, during a joint conference with the five processing detective contingents, the Inspector said, "Speed it up! Get 'em out there where the action occurred. Let 'em show you how they did it — in front of a camera. Tomorrow — that's Friday — and not a second later than four P.M., we got to let the stenographers start taking down their formal statements. Move!"

Sleep had been a stranger to Joe on Wednesday night. Sleep and Joe remained strangers Thursday night. He kept himself going with cigarettes, sandwiches, and lots of black coffee. Friday afternoon, at ten minutes to four, he marched up to Duffy.

"We have the details and the photographed 'reenactments' of Johnson's part in nineteen successive crimes," Joe announced.

"Well?" Duffy said, frowning.

"We didn't have time to run him through job number twenty."

Duffy grinned. "Okay. The cake's yours."

"Huh?"

"The Prosecutor's really after the details on the five killings. He'll schedule the easiest and juiciest murder for quick trial, so he can grab lots of headlines. Couple of crews had to cram, skip — to get in the murders. They're three and four jobs short, Joe."

"Then I don't get the dunce cap."

"Naw. You and your boys just trot Johnson through the nineteen jobs and he'll sing the whole tune to that last stick-up by ear. The Prosecutor ain't worrying about what *we* miss. It's nearly four o'clock. Get going, Joe."

Each processing detective crew herded its own Quintet culprit up to the fourth floor of Headquarters and into an enormous, open, desk-strewn, rectangular room whose facilities were officially the property of the rank and file members of the Homicide Squad. Four of the Quintet were placed, separately, in the big rectangle's corners. Joe, his crew, and a stenographer gave Johnson a chair near a cluster of battered desks in the very middle of the room. He began making his formal statement Friday at precisely four P.M.

It was a slow, tedious task: boring, unexciting. They started with the first crime. Deleting extraneous matter as they went along, they retained as best they could the essential, relevant facts which were material to Johnson's own acts and words, and such other acts and words as occurred or were spoken in his presence. When an original copy and a stack of carbons were typed, Goldberg read the content aloud to the chauffeur. Johnson read it aloud, then signed the confession. Joe and his colleagues provided witnessing signatures. A notary's seal was affixed to the document. And the procedure began again in connection with crime number two.

It went on and on. The detectives and culprits alike drank coffee, chewed sandwiches, lit one cigarette from another, and wistfully toyed with the idea of climbing in a bed.

Inspector Duffy roared, "Chief Belden's at home. He just 'phoned me. He's been in constant contact with Prosecutor Lowell. They'll be arriving here at Headquarters in a little while. Speed it up! How far off is Saturday morning?"

Gradually, the glare from the room's blazing lights turned the working men's haggard eyes into dull rubies. Their heads ached. Joe and his crew finished with Johnson's nineteenth statement.

When Homicide's Shaw said it was already Saturday morning, Joe glanced at his wrist-watch. It was one A.M.

Bandit's Carlton said, "I'm dead on my feet."

"These boys," Shaw said, "just didn't mix with other crooks. They ain't handed us a single lead yet. Whiz this last one along."

Carlton said, "Joe, take a squint at

that Wednesday's 'squeal sheet.' Go by that — and get this job over with!"

Glancing at a piece of paper, Joe said, "Give us the facts on your last job, Johnson."

Johnson said, "Tuesday night, I stole a set of license plates. Then I went in a 'phone booth and called the poolroom where them other boys was at. We got a job set for next day."

"Go on," Joe said.

"I went straight home," Johnson said, "and got in bed. Next morning — Wednesday — I got up at eight o'clock. I was by myself. I never took nobody to my room — 'cause ol' Mrs. Stevens trusted me. Once, her lawyer — Mr. Colbax Todd — writ a 'portant paper for her. She told me what was in it, axted me to put my name on it. So she musta trusted me. And I —"

Joe interrupted. Irrelevancies were creeping in. "You got up at eight A.M."

Johnson said, "That paper never took care of me — lak it did them others. So I let them other boys talk me into —"

Joe interrupted again. "You got up at eight o'clock!"

"All that," Johnson said, "was before Mrs. Stevens went to th' hospital."

Shaw said, "What did you do Wednesday after eight?"

"I fixed a meal," Johnson said, "and et it. I was nervous. So I went and got th' car and driv to th' Middle Ward."

"Take time out there to talk to anybody?" Joe asked.

"I seen Prophet Hamid. He was right in front of his temple on Nickle Street. I knowed him. So when he called me, I stopped th' car. He axted me would I go and git an ol' man by th' name of Tom Turner. And I said yes. I went."

Joe said, "Anybody go with you? Where does Turner live?"

"I was by myself. He live on Dawkins Place. I don't know th' number. I just knows th' house. I driv there. Ol' man Turner was just coming out his front door. I driv him to th' Prophet's temple. I never got out. I driv to Oldhaven Park and done what I always done in there — switched license plates on th' car."

"Go on," Joe said.

"Then I driv to Commerce Square. A loan shop we was going to rob was there. I parked a block off. Them four other boys walked past and went in th' loan shop. They run out, jumped in th' car, and I started it. A block off we run into a radio car with two cops in it. They was awful mad at us for hitting 'em. They found out we was robbers. So they 'rested all five of us."

Joe said, "It was eleven A.M. Just who is Tom Turner?"

"An ol' man what used to go to th' church where I goes at."

Shaw said, "What about Prophet Hamid?"

"Him?" Johnson said. "Everybody down in th' Middle Ward knows *him*. I seen him 'round lots."

"In the Mattox — for instance?" Shaw asked. "With Big Rose?"

"Yeah. He make lak he know what you thinking 'bout. I give him plenty chances to tell me my mind. He's just a lot of big mouf."

Shaw said, "This wraps it up, boys. I'll call Duffy." He did.

Duffy said, "You fellows all through?"

"'Cept for one thing," Johnson said.

"Yeah?" Duffy said. "What's that?"

"I b'lieves," Johnson replied, "I deserves a break — 'cause I just ain't what you can call *bad*. Before I met up with them four other boys, I had never been in no real trouble. Mrs. Stevens — she took very sick. She said to me, 'Albert, you'll need another job. Use the car to look for one if you like.' So I —"

Interrupting, Duffy said, "She didn't mean for you to use her car in twenty stick-ups and five murders."

"I never done th' killings," the chauffeur said. "I just driv th' car. For them other boys. Before that I had a good record. Axt my pastor, Reverend G. J. Ball. Axt Mrs. Stevens."

Duffy said, "She's comatose."

"She's *what?*" Johnson said.

"In a coma. Unconscious," Duffy explained.

"Oh," Johnson said. "But Detective Hill — he know th' real thing what made me rob folks. And I think he should help git me a break."

Duffy said, "First, give him a break. Sign this last statement."

"Okay. Sure! Didn't I sign them other statements?"

At two A.M. Joe got in an elevator. When he stepped out on the first floor, Chief Belden was waiting to go up.

"The arraignment is set for one P.M., Monday," Belden said. "You look busted up."

Joe was a big man: six feet one inch in height, with two hundred pounds of solid muscle appropriately strung along an excellently developed frame. Ordinarily, his eyes were a shade of brown in complete consonance with the chestnut hue of his skin. But now his eyes were bloodshot, his face a mat of unshaven black bristles, and his huge physique literally drooped.

He said, "I *feel* busted up too."

"I know," Belden said. "You needn't come in till noon, Monday."

Wearily, Joe stumbled out to the sidewalk in front of Headquarters just as several cars pulled up to the curb. Prosecutor Elwood Lowell and some of his assistants got out. A taxicab rounded a corner. Joe signaled its driver.

He got in the cab. "The Wallace Thurman Houses — Unit Four — on the far side of the Middle Ward."

Pulling away from the curb, the taxi-driver said, "What'd they have you down to Headquarters for, huh, buddy?"

Tired, on edge, Joe snatched a gold-plated shield out of his pocket. Sticking it over the driver's shoulder and under the man's nose, he said, "Cop!

Central Bureau. See? I'm in a hurry."

The tiny three-room apartment on the fourth floor of the model housing development where Joe maintained bachelor quarters was a welcome sight. Joe took one look at himself in the bathroom mirror. Then he stumbled into the bedroom and collapsed across the bed without removing anything except his hat.

The telephone awakened him. Rolling over, he picked up the jangling instrument and heard Chief Belden's voice say:

"Lad, Joe, my boy! This is a helluva crime, and I should be eternally incarcerated for committing it. But you've got to come back to Headquarters. Right away."

"Huh?" Joe grunted. "What time is it?"

"Four A.M.," Belden replied. "I know you just left here. But listen: an old-fashioned schoolteacher, named Middlesexton, brought a little colored kid down here just now. The kid says she don't trust white cops. Her teacher backs her up about that. If it wasn't for that teacher — wait'll you see her — we'd take the box."

Joe said, "Box?"

"Yes. The kid's got something in a box."

"There're ten other Negro cops in Oldhaven," Joe said.

"Yeah! In uniform," Belden said. "You know they can't — get th' hell down here, Detective Hill!"

"Yes, sir," Joe said, adding, "as soon as I put on my hat!"

Luck brought a cab for Joe in ten minutes. At fifteen minutes to five Saturday morning he entered Chief Belden's office where he found the Chief, a freshly shaven Inspector Duffy, Prosecutor Elwood Lowell, and two other people. One was a gray-haired little old lady, dressed in a style years and years out of date, whose chalk-white countenance was a combination of grim sternness and prim stubbornness. The other was a very small black girl. She was shabbily clothed, but clean. Her eyes were big, round, packed with frank suspicion and jammed with naked fear. With trembling hands she clutched a package about five inches long, three inches wide, two inches deep — wrapped in white paper, tied with a green string.

The Chief was seated behind his desk. Duffy and the Prosecutor occupied chairs near Belden. Their faces seemed unusually pink. The child and the little old lady sat side by side in straight-back chairs against one of the room's walls. The little old lady favored Joe's rumpled clothes, bearded face, and red eyes with one glance. She reacted unfavorably.

Looking at the little old lady, the child said, "He's colored. But is he a real policeman? He don't wear clothes lak none."

"He *doesn't* wear clothes *like one*, June," the old lady replied.

"Yes, ma'am," the child said. "*Doesn't — like — one.*"

The little old lady fixed Chief Belden with a stern stare. "Is this the person we've been waiting for?"

Belden gulped, sputtering, "Er — madam — he —"

"Miss Middlesexton, please."

"Yes, ma'am," Belden said. "Miss Middlesexton."

Duffy said, "This person — as Miss Middlesexton calls Detective Hill — has been continuously at work since Wednesday afternoon. He hasn't had time to bathe, shave, or put on clean clothing."

The Inspector had addressed the Chief who regained enough composure to say, "Detective Hill, ma'am, is a graduate of a most reputable university where he was a high ranking student and an ace athlete. He won — and I do mean *won* — a post in our Department when he was twenty-two years old. He spent seven and a half years in uniform before we had the good sense to upgrade him to plainclothes status. For more than a year now he's been a member of my own personal organization, the Central Bureau."

"And we think," Duffy added, "he's a nicely balanced piece of physical and mental machinery."

"June," Miss Middlesexton told the child, "I'm satisfied that this man is an authentic officer. You may tell him your story."

Belden said, "Ma'am, let's hear a word from you first."

"Thank you," Miss Middlesexton said. "June, whose last name is Jones, is a second grade pupil of mine at Public School Twenty. Early Friday morning she came to my desk and asked me to escort her to a policeman, adding that he must be colored. Unfortunately, Chief Belden, some Middle Ward children are afraid of —"

Belden said hastily, "Please continue, ma'am."

"I didn't care to become involved in a trifling matter," Miss Middlesexton said. "I demanded that June tell me why she needed a policeman."

"She wouldn't talk?" Belden said.

Miss Middlesexton nodded. "I know now I was too exacting. At one o'clock this morning June rang my doorbell at Fifty-four Wilson Avenue."

Belden interrupted. "Where does June live?"

The child said, "Sixty-eight Dawkins Place. Top floor. Rear."

Belden leaned forward. "Miss Middlesexton, June is a mere child. Dawkins Place and Wilson Avenue are five miles apart. How'd she know where you live? How'd she get there?"

"Once a semester for the past thirty years," Miss Middlesexton explained, "I entertain my school charges in my home. Of course, on those occasions, I escort them there. June attended the last party a month ago. I presume she —"

Looking at Joe, June interrupted. "I walked to where she lives at."

Miss Middlesexton said, "June showed me the contents of the box —" The little old lady swallowed hard, her pale face turning gray.

Belden smiled at June. "Let's see what's in your box. Hmmn?"

The child looked at Joe.

"Chief Belden," he said, "is a nice man. Cross my heart!"

The child got out of her chair and sat on the floor. She untied her package's green string, stripped off its white paper, holding the underside up so Joe could see it.

Wearily, he sat down on the floor beside the child. "Letters apparently cut out of newspapers," he said, "are pasted here, saying, 'Talk only to the Lord's True Messenger.' "

Duffy got out of his chair. "It's an ordinary match-box," he said. "Slide it open, kid."

As enormous tears welled up in her eyes, the child said, "Pa Tom never come home Wednesday night. Nor Thursday night. Nor before I slipped off from Ma Grace, and — and —"

Miss Middlesexton said, "I understand June's parents were killed some time ago in an automobile accident. She lives with an elderly pair of grandparents. Her maternal grandparents."

Duffy said, "Come on kid. Open the box."

The child said, "There was another box — before this one. Me and Ma Grace found it Thursday morning laying on th' floor in th' hall — jes' outside th' door. Ma Grace acted real scared. 'Chile,' she tole me, 'don't you talk to nobody 'bout this!' When I come back from school, Ma Grace was laying on her bed, crying, moaning, and praying to God to tell her what to do. Friday morning I found this here box. Pa Tom — he was still gone. So I never tole Ma Grace I had done found it. Miss Middlesexton — she's white. But I trusts her. So I axted her to help me."

Joe said, "Pa Tom. Tom. Dawkins Place."

"He my grandpa," the child said. "And that's where I lives at."

Miss Middlesexton said, "Her grandparents are Thomas and Grace Turner."

Belden picked up one of the telephones on his desk. "Rush this," he said. "Steer a prowl to sixty-eight Dawkins Place, top floor, rear flat. Investigate the absence of Thomas Turner."

Miss Middlesexton said, "June, you must — must open it now."

"Yes, ma'am," the child said. Then she slid the box open.

Inspector Duffy said, "Good God!"

"What is it?" Belden said.

Joe said, "A finger. It's black. A piece of cotton is stuck on the spot where it was cut off from —"

He stopped talking because the child had burst into loud hysterical sobs. His weariness seemed to evaporate. Anger rose up inside of him, heating his brain, stimulating it, making bits of images and word pictures rush through his mind. He stayed right where he was — on the floor — and took the screaming little girl in his arms, cradling her, rocking with her from side to side.

He was only half-aware that Miss Middlesexton had seated herself beside him to help soothe the child with a woman's voice and hand. He hardly noticed the routine fashion with which Belden and Duffy and Prosecutor Elwood Lowell were handling the telephones on the Chief's desk —

summoning Homicide Squad Lieutenant O'Hara, photographers, fingerprint technicians, an Assistant Police Surgeon, Prosecutor's Investigators. Joe gave practically all his attention to the assembly of image and word fragments so that he could examine the result for a clue to what he knew would be missing.

He heard Belden saying, "Joe! Joe! Snap out of it!"

"Yes, sir." He looked at his wristwatch. It said 5:45 A.M.

"This is your case, Joe," Belden said. "Looks like a nasty one."

Duffy said, "Joe needs rest."

One of the telephones on the Chief's desk jangled. When Belden replaced the instrument, he said, "Prowl car boys reporting on the trip to Dawkins Place. They found another box outside the Turner's hall door. They broke into the flat and found Grace Turner — she was very old — a D-O-A."

"D-O-A?" Miss Middlesexton said. "What does that mean?"

Duffy glanced at the child whom Joe was still cradling in his arms. She had quieted down. "Do it mean," she said, "that Ma Grace done been scared so — she's dead?"

"D-O-A," Duffy told Miss Middlesexton, "means dead on arrival."

"Frightened into her grave!" the little old lady exclaimed. "Can't you *do* something?"

Joe said, "I think I'm on to what it's about, ma'am. I want June to answer a few questions. What work do your grandparents do, June?"

"They worked," the child replied, "a long time ago. But not now. Because of th' Gov'ment checks and my state check."

"Do you mean," Joe said, "that your grandparents get old age pension checks, and that you —"

June interrupted. "Yes, sir. And I'm what they call a 'State Child' — 'cause my parents is dead. Th' state — it gives Pa Tom and Ma Grace money for my keep."

Belden said, "That kind of money isn't big enough for a motive —"

Joe interrupted. "June, where'd your grandparents *used* to work?"

"Pa Tom — he driv th' carriage. Ma Grace — she done th' cooking. It was for a rich lady. Then she got a automobile. And she give up her big estate. And Pa Tom and Ma Grace — they was too old to do much more work. So then my father and mother — they chauffeured and cooked for —"

"Now this is it!" Joe said. "What was the rich lady's name?"

"I don't rightly know her name," the child replied. "Pa Tom and Ma Grace — they got mad at th' lady. Because she said they was too old to work. And Pa Tom wanted th' rich lady to keep th' carriage. But she got th' car. That was how my mother and father was killed — in the car one day, going somewhere. And Pa Tom — he said he never wanted to hear that rich lady's name called in front of his ears."

Joe said, "Where do you go to church, June?"

"I still goes to Reverend G. J. Ball's church. Pa Tom and Ma Grace — they quit going there. Only old people can go where they go. Reverend Ball — he used to come to th' house to axt Pa Tom and Ma Grace to come back to his church. But Pa Tom — he said that all his life he'd been going to Reverend Ball's kind of church and that his kind of church weren't doing our people no good. Reverend Ball — he said no cult was going to help our people either."

"I wonder," Joe said, "if Prosecutor Lowell will telephone a lawyer for us. If the Prosecutor does it, we'll save time."

"Anything," Lowell said. "What's the lawyer's name?"

Duffy said, "Have you got something, Joe?"

"I'll know after the Prosecutor makes that 'phone call," Joe replied. "His name now. It's in our files. But maybe I can remember it. Bard? Hodge? No. Rod? Doesn't fit."

"You'd better use the files," Belden said.

"I've got it," Joe said. "The name's Colbax Todd."

"Todd?" Prosecutor Lowell said. "What's Colbax Todd got to do with this?"

Joe said, "Ask him if he has a Mrs. Stevens as a client. Ask him if he recently drew up a will for her in which Thomas and Grace Turner appear among the beneficiaries. If so, for what amount?"

Lowell said, "I'll make the call. But I know Todd will insist he has to consult his client before he can give —"

Duffy interrupted. "She's comatose in Wildwood Hospital. Or was. By now, she may be dead."

"Oh!" Lowell said. "Then Todd may — I'll 'phone him."

"Maybe this'll add up!" Belden exclaimed, motioning Lowell to a 'phone on his desk.

When Lowell put down the instrument, he said, "Todd's client died about five hours ago. She left the Turners an outright bequest of fifty thousand dollars."

"Okay, Joe," Belden said. "You've got the motive. Now what?"

Joe said, "Can we stage a couple of raids? Simultaneously? And right away?"

"I told you," Belden said, "this was your case. We raid. Now!"

Joe, Belden and Duffy, riding in the first car of a stream of police vehicles, left Headquarters at 6:45 A.M. The last shades of night were bowing out of the sky and the city was fast discarding sleep for another day of toil and turmoil. The cars kept their sirens silent.

"I've been watching you, Joe," Chief Belden said. "I think this thing's made you mad."

Joe didn't say anything.

The police caravan swung into the section of Oldhaven known as the Middle Ward. It was not at all unlike any other Negro community in any other northern Big City. Most of it was slum area.

Duffy said, "We're on Nickle

Street now. So we're almost there."

"The other raiding party, according to you, Joe," Belden said, "is more likely to find Turner than we are."

Duffy said, "As soon as we break in at our end, I'll cover the 'phones and call Lieutenant O'Hara at the other end of the job."

The car stopped. Belden said, "This place was once a store."

The front of the building before which they stopped had been renovated so that it resembled a combination of sectarian structures: a church, a mosque, a miniature cathedral.

Duffy said, "Give the guys a couple of seconds to get set."

"Pretty early," Belden said. "The door's probably locked."

"There's a bell," Joe said.

"Think he'll try and start something, Joe?" Belden said.

Joe replied, "I hope he does!"

"You keep your head," Belden advised. "No matter how mad you —"

Duffy said, "This is it. Let's go."

Joe rang the bell. A woman opened the door, grasped who the visitors were, and started to back away.

"Just take it easy, sister," Duffy told her. "How many 'phones in this place?"

"One," the woman said. "It's in the office."

"Where's Hamid?" Belden asked her.

"In the office," the woman replied.

Belden said, "No noise. Get going. Take us there."

The woman led them through a small, dark auditorium. She opened a door. Pushing her inside, they closed the door behind them. A man sat at a desk on which a telephone rested.

Belden said, "Are you Prophet Hamid?"

The man stood up. He was short and very slim. The hair on his head was long, kinky, and reddish. Some of it made a sharp, straight line just under his nose and a Vandyke on his chin. His skin was a freckled saddle-yellow. He wore a black cutaway coat with satin lapels, a clerical collar, striped pants, and shiny black shoes with pointed toes. He looked like a dressed-up bantam rooster.

"May I use your 'phone?" Duffy said, taking over the instrument so that the man had to step away from the desk.

"You're up early this morning," Belden told the man.

The man said, "We always have an early service on Saturdays."

"That used to be," Belden said. "But no more."

"What do you mean?" the man said. "Just who are you?"

Joe said, "The police."

"You can't come in here like this!" the man exclaimed. "This is a holy place. I'm a holy man!"

"Shut up!" Belden told him.

For a while nobody said anything. The only sound in the room was the hard breathing of the woman. Then there was a knock on the door and Duffy said, "Come in!"

A detective opened the door "We've combed the place," he said

"Upstairs. In the cellar. We didn't find him."

Belden nodded, waved the detective out of the room, and looked at Duffy. " 'Phone Lieutenant O'Hara. See what he found."

After Duffy put back the 'phone, he said, "Joe was right, Chief. O'Hara found Turner, three fingers missing, stashed in the Mattox Hotel. The woman who runs the place — Big Rose — is talking."

Belden said, "Okay, Hamid. Now *you* talk."

"The lot of you!" Hamid said. "Get out of here!"

Joe walked over to Hamid and slapped his face.

Belden said, "For your own sake, Hamid — talk."

Standing close to Hamid, Joe said, "How long have Thomas and Grace Turner been members of your cult?"

"Don't crowd me!" Hamid said.

"Not long enough, huh?" Joe said. "Not long enough for you to work your real racket on them."

"Just how does he do it, Joe?" Duffy asked.

"As soon as old people, like the Turners, fall under the spell of his mumbo-jumbo," Joe said, "he demands the last pieces of property they have in the world — their insurance policies. He uses his temple as a front. By persuasion, by force, by tricks, by any means he can think of, Hamid makes the old people change the beneficiaries originally named in their policies so that when they die the money is bequeathed to his temple. The old people will usually sign any paper he hands them. Occasionally, he has them borrow money on their policies. Frequently, he makes them surrender the policies for their cash value. And *he* pockets the money."

"Hamid," Duffy said, "we've been questioning one of the Quintet Bandits. I mean Albert Johnson. We know that Johnson told you that a wealthy woman, Mrs. Stevens, had named Thomas and Grace Turner in her will. We also know that Johnson told you that Mrs. Stevens was dying. You take it from there, Joe."

"There's a clincher — a big payoff — to Hamid's racket," Joe said. "He cuts the whole hog. He knows his own people — Negroes. He draws his cult membership from the most ignorant, the most superstitious, the most stupid of them. He knows they regard all public institutions — including law-enforcement agencies and the courts — as hostile to their interests. So he inveigles his ancient cultists into signing an agreement giving all they own to his temple."

Duffy said, "Hmmn-huh. When he learned that the Turners were beneficiaries in the Stevens will and Mrs. Stevens was dying, he moved fast."

Moving still closer to Hamid, Joe said, "He got his hands on old man Turner, got Big Rose to stash the man in the Mattox Hotel. But Turner held out. Time was short. Hamid cut off the old man's fingers, one by one. He sent the fingers to Grace Turner to terrorize her into coming to him to beg for mercy."

"Move away from me!" Hamid screamed at Joe.

Joe's right shoulder moved suddenly. His right fist smashed hard against Hamid's mouth. Hamid went down on the floor, mouthing profanity and blood.

Belden said, "Easy, Joe. Easy, boy. Don't lose your head."

Duffy said, "Want to talk now, Hamid? Before Detective Hill really goes to work on you? The Chief may try and stop Hill but I won't!"

Belden said, "Hamid, Mrs. Stevens is dead. Bet you didn't know."

Duffy said, "And guess what? The County Prosecutor is going into the courts to have Tom Turner declared incompetent. The Turners' grandchild will get the Stevens dough."

"She wouldn't have got it," Hamid said, "if the old man had signed!"

"The terrorizing you gave Grace Turner," Belden said, "killed her."

Duffy laughed. "Prosecutor Lowell says we can't make a murder rap stick to you, Hamid. But we insist that he have you indicted for murder. Not long ago he asked us — the police — to do the impossible. We did it. Now we want him to do it. After all, no matter how you did it, you murdered Grace Turner. We want you, Hamid — for murder."

"Tell me just one thing," Hamid said. "Johnson — that chauffeur — didn't know. He said he thought it would be about a thousand dollars. But just how much did that Mrs. Stevens leave the Turners?"

Belden said, "Huh! This is funny. This is going to give this rat a bigger thrill than the chair. Tell him, Joe."

Joe said, "Fifty thousand dollars."

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THE KNIFE OF THE CELESTIAL BROTHERHOOD

by LEMUEL DE BRA

I DO not know how long I had sat there listening to the queer tale that my friend Chen Wan recited to me in his quiet, charming Cantonese. I know only that I became suddenly aware that he had ceased speaking, that my forgotten pipe was rank with cold ashes. On the wall back of Chen Wan I saw the colored paper lanterns stir gently in the evening breeze. I became conscious of the odor of incense mingled with the heavy fragrance of Oriental flowers. From the walk below, one of the narrow, twisting alleys in San Francisco's Chinatown, came the stealthy drag of Chinese slippers, the muffled sound of voices in harsh, guttural undertones. Opposite me, his arms resting on the ebony table, sat Chen Wan, his head bowed, his face in shadows.

I rapped the dottle from my pipe, refilled it, and struck a match. At that, as though the sound had startled him from reverie, Chen raised his head.

"Well, Minturn," he said, dropping into his crisp, precise English, "what would you think of it? If you were in my place, what would you do?"

"Hanged if I know, Chen!" I replied truthfully. "It's a devilish queer situation. It doesn't sound real."

"Ah, but it is! See here!" From a drawer in the table, Chen took something wrapped in a yellow silk handkerchief, and laid it down before my eyes. I saw the soft glimmer of steel, and made out presently a long Chinese knife with straight blade and a corded handle.

"This," spoke Chen quietly, "is the knife of the Celestial Brotherhood; the knife with which I am to slay Bock Gee, a man whom I know only by sight; a man who, so far as I have ever learned, has never done me harm."

I was too amazed for speech. Chen Wan and I had been intimate friends for many years. I met him first in China when I was there years ago as a secret agent of the Treasury Department. Then, when I went to the University of California to specialize in Oriental languages I found Chen there, and our friendship grew. He was a quiet sort, eager to learn, and almost worshipful in his admiration of America and American ideals and institutions. In those days I found it very easy to think of Chen Wan as a friend, very difficult to remember that he was of the mysterious Orient.

I had not heard from him for some time when, on this evening, I received an urgent summons to call at his

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rooms on Canton Street. He was in trouble, he wrote me, and felt that he must talk with someone. "I think you will understand better than anyone I know," the note finished; "so please come. You will find the stair door unlocked."

Of course, I went. And of course, Chen Wan, steeped in four thousand years of Chinese ceremony, kept me waiting while we ate a most delicious dish composed of young duck cooked with pineapple, and sipped innumerable bowls of steaming Sou-chong, and talked about everything under the sun save that which I had come to hear.

Then, finally, Chen Wan had sent the dishes away, lighted a cigarette, and told me in his quiet, charming Cantonese, that strange tale of the Celestial Brotherhood and of the knife with the corded hilt.

The name of the society, when Chen had spoken it the third time, stirred memories of something I had read years before in a queer old tome in the library at Canton. It seems that something less than twenty-five hundred years ago, when Confucius and his disciples were stirring the Chinese nation just as the Man of Nazareth, five hundred years later, shook the foundations of the Jewish government, a number of jealous Chinese priests formed a secret society and called themselves the Celestial Brotherhood.

Just what was the object of this organization, I do not know, and probably shall never learn; but undoubtedly it had undergone many changes between the time those old Oriental priests banded together in far off Cathay, and the night, twenty-five centuries later, that I sat on Chen Wan's balcony here in San Francisco and listened to his strange story.

More than that, I learned only what Chen Wan thought wise to tell me. I learned that membership was by birth, being handed down from father to son. When his father died, Chen Wan, at the age of fourteen, had been taken into the society, and had sworn by the Oath of the Bloody Wine to uphold the principles of the Celestial Brotherhood and obey its mandates forever.

"Chen, that was all right so long as you were in China," I said, "but when you came to America and became Americanized, you should have renounced this dangerous organization."

"Easily said!" Chen smiled, and made a graceful gesture with his slender hands. "When I came to America I knew only the few words of English I had learned at the Mission. This was a strange land with strange customs. When I found here in San Francisco a branch of the organization, I was glad to accept the advantages my membership gave me. Besides, you must not forget that I remain in America only by grace of being a student. I was born in China. Some day, I must go back."

I sat up. There was something in Chen's tone that told me more than his words, and for a moment I had a queer feeling of mingled amusement

and pity. For I saw now that Chen, for all his college education, with all his admiration of progressive American ways, was in the grip of Chinese superstition. He stood in fear of this ancient organization.

"Chen, don't be a fool!" I spoke up. "This is America. However just it may seem to the Chinese mind for you to run this ugly knife through Bock Gee, in this country it's plain murder. You can't do it. Don't be afraid of this tom-fool society. Why, man, you're within hailing distance of a dozen American policemen! Tell the Celestial Brotherhood to go to the devil!"

Chen Wan shook his head. "I can't do it, Minturn; I can't do it!"

I regarded him a moment in silence. His fatalism, his calm resignation to what he considered the inevitable, gave me a miserable feeling of depression.

"Who's this Bock Gee, anyway?" I inquired, mainly to gain time. "What's he done that he should be killed?"

"Have you forgotten already that I told you all that?" smiled Chen. "Bock Gee is a member of the order. He has persistently violated his oath; how, I cannot tell you. They have voted his death. It is not often that anything like this is done. Names were drawn. Mine is the honor" — Chen bowed his head with fine irony — "of being the society's executioner."

"Supposing the police catch you?"

"Better that than violate my oath of obedience," countered Chen.

I smoked a moment.

"Why not skip the country, Chen?"

He shook his head. "Absolutely useless. I might escape for awhile. But sooner or later, the agents of the brotherhood would track me down. And all that time I would be living in the shadow of their vengeance. No, there is no escape!"

"Why, you poor fool!" I said, and I tried to make my tone sting. "I thought you had acquired some sound American sense. You're acting like a half-witted heathen. Come, Chen! Let's see if we can't reason some way out of this mess! This Celestial outfit has pronounced the death sentence on Bock Gee. You have been selected to do their dirty work. I suppose they gave you a certain time limit. When is the time up?"

Chen answered with unruffled temper.

"I was given one week in which to either slay Bock Gee or incur the punishment for disobedience. The week will be up," he looked at his watch, "in exactly twenty minutes."

"The devil you say!" I became suddenly alarmed. "Why didn't you send for me before this?"

"Because I was not quite sure of my course. Besides, you could not have helped me. No one, nothing can help me. But now that I have made my decision, I wanted to tell you because — afterward — I wanted you to understand."

"For Heaven's sake, Chen, what are you talking about?"

"Simply this," Chen broke in

quietly; "I have decided to take the easiest way out. I shall not kill Bock Gee. I cannot do that. Neither shall I face the wrath of the Brotherhood. There is a way, an easy way. I ——"

He slurred the word, and fell silent. I saw his right hand drop casually over the corded hilt of the Chinese knife.

I could not keep down a cold shudder. In the face of this black fatalism, I felt absolutely helpless. Here was a young man of splendid intelligence, finely educated, a tribute to twentieth century progress; and out of the dead centuries had come a ruthless hand to drag him back to the slough of Oriental superstition and cold-blooded murder. It was horrible.

Before I could find my tongue, there came an interruption. The servant of Chen, he who had waited on us while we ate, glided softly out of the shadowy hallway, approached his master's side, and bowed.

"Pardon my disrespect," he said in Cantonese, "but, master, there is a visitor at your door who will not leave."

"Tell him I can see no one," interrupted Chen sharply.

"I have told him that many times, sir; but he will not walk his way."

"His name?"

"He refuses to give it."

"Do you know him?"

"He keeps his face in shadows."

"Well, then ——"

"Sir, to please the fellow I finally agreed to bring you this writing." He laid a folded paper on the table.

I saw Chen Wan stare at it, wide-eyed, as though he had already guessed the message, yet feared to read it. Then I saw his trembling hands unfold the rice tissue and hold it to the light. Slowly, he laid it down again.

"You may show him in," said Chen Wan calmly.

The instant the servant had left, Chen bent forward, and whispered, "Minturn, it's one of the brotherhood. Probably come to remind me that the time is about up. Hide you behind that screen, and listen. Then, by The Three Pure Ones, you'll understand."

"No," I objected. "Let's face ——"

"Go quickly!" begged Chen. "Please! For my sake!"

From down the hallway came the sound of shuffling slippers. I arose and stepped quietly behind the stand screen, a huge affair figured with a stork, a pine tree, and a tortoise — all emblems of a long and happy life — done in threads of gold and purple on a background of black silk.

I stood there, waiting and listening; and I remember how it all seemed very strange and unreal. Below me, in the alley, I could see shadowy forms pass beneath the dim rays of the street lamp, then vanish. Half a block away was a pool-room facing the main street; and I could hear voices and the sharp click of rolling balls.

Then Chen Wan was speaking.

"*Hoo la ma!*" he said. "How do you do!"

"Good evening!" returned a voice

in cautious Cantonese. "Are we alone?"

"Is one ever alone?" parried Chen. "Does not the Eye of Heaven see all human actions? Well, speak freely, sir! Who are you? What is your business with me? And why do you mask your face like a thief?"

"Patience, Son of Chen! By the Nine Heavens, you shall hear enough! I — I am one of the Brotherhood."

"So you informed me in your note. You come, I suppose, to tell me that the time is almost up. Why remind me of something I cannot forget?"

I saw the masked man take a step nearer Chen Wan. He spoke with slow emphasis.

"On the contrary, Chen Wan, I come to tell you that if you will place the knife of the Brotherhood in my hands, I, myself, will go forth and slay Bock Gee for you."

There was a long silence.

"*Ts-ing tso!*" spoke Chen Wan finally. "Please sit down. Now let me hear you say that again. You will kill Bock Gee for me. Why?"

Through the narrow opening, where the screen hinged, I saw the masked man seat himself on the stool I had just left. He looked at Chen Wan. Between them, on the table, I could see the glitter of a long blade.

"I am happy to tell you that, Son of Chen," the caller replied. "Bock Gee has many times broken the precepts of the Brotherhood because he was greedy for profit; but there is one oath that none of us ever violate."

"Yes?" encouraged Chen Wan.

The masked man raised both hands.

"And this shall be my creed," he quoted dramatically: "'*Never forget a friend; never forgive an enemy!*'"

"I remember that," spoke Chen. "Well, then, I suppose this Bock Gee is an enemy of yours."

"No, Son of Chen, he is not. But your father *was my friend.*"

I saw Chen Wan lean back on his stool. He got out his case and, with his usual deliberation, selected a cigarette, and lighted it. For a moment he smoked thoughtfully.

"I begin to understand," he said at length. "My father ascended the dragon many years ago in China. It appears that whilst he lived he did you some favor. Now you propose to repay the debt by slaying Bock Gee for me. This is very strange. Has Bock Gee ever done you any harm?"

"None whatever. But what has that to do with the matter? The Brotherhood has voted his death. Sometime, someone for the Brotherhood will slay him."

"I suppose that is true," admitted Chen Wan slowly.

"Certainly. But why use an ox-knife to slay a fowl? You are a young man with much to lose. You have learning. You should be prosperous and happy. Should you slay Bock Gee, the foreign devil police might send you to prison for life. On the other hand, I am an old man. I have little to live for. Therefore, I shall slay Bock Gee. In that way will my debt to your family be paid. And yet, the Brotherhood will think it was your

hand that guided the blade through Bock Gee's heart."

"I understand," said Chen Wan. "I'm very grateful to you, friend; and very sorry. But it cannot be. This is America; and in America taking a man's life is murder. I cannot let you do it."

"*Ts! Ts!* That is foolish talk, Son of Chen! The white foreign devils have many stupid laws. Anyone knows that according to Chinese law the sentence of death pronounced upon Bock Gee is just. Isn't that true?"

"*Hi low;* that is true."

"And no one knows it better than Bock Gee himself."

"Yes; but I cannot forget that this is America."

"Nor can I forget that we are Chinese," retorted the other. "It is very simple. With one swift blow I shall slay Bock Gee, save your face with the Brotherhood, and pay my debt to your family. But I must have the knife of the Brotherhood. You know the reason for that. The knife is an emblem of Brotherhood justice."

His voice rose, then slurred quickly into silence. I saw his hands pounce on the knife that lay on the table before him. Apparently the mask had prevented him from seeing it before.

"Sit down!" spoke Chen Wan sharply. "You must not do this thing. I shall deal with the Brotherhood myself." He looked at his watch. "In five minutes ——"

"Five minutes! Then ——?"

"Sit down! In five minutes one of the Brotherhood will be here. I shall be waiting for him. When he sees me, he will know at once that I was brave enough to defy their order, yet too cowardly to face their anger."

"Fool!" cried the masked man, drawing away. "Slaying yourself will not save Bock Gee."

"No; and nothing can save me."

"Senseless chatter! I can save you! With one blow ——"

"You shall not! What did my father ever do for you that ——"

"There is no time ——"

"Answer me!"

"Your father saved me and mine from starvation. It was the winter of the big flood. I was ruined. Your father took us to his dwelling. He was not rich; but he fed us, clothed us, and in the spring gave me rice and pulse and helped me start my crops again. I could never repay him. This is the only way I can ever pay the debt I owe his family."

Chen Wan's servant entered.

"Master, there is a man at the door. He says he had an appointment with you at this hour."

I saw Chen Wan jerk out his watch, stare at it a moment, then slowly raise his head.

"That is correct," he said calmly. "Tell the caller I shall be ready to receive him in a moment."

The servant left.

"Wait a minute!" Chen said to his visitor. "I seem to remember, now. That winter — Strange I cannot recall your family name!"

"It doesn't matter."

Suddenly Chen Wan bent forward.

His right hand shot out, caught the handkerchief, tore it off the other's face.

I saw the two men leap to their feet. The heavy stools crashed to the floor. But with all that, I heard clearly Chen Wan's hoarse whisper:

"*Bock Gee!*"

"Yes!" cried Bock Gee. "And for the debt I owe your family ——"

"No, no!"

"—— I shall do this deed for you."

"Stop! In the name of *The Seven Gods!*"

Suddenly Chen Wan made a spring, and Bock Gee dodged out of my sight. I heard Chen Wan utter a horrified cry. I heard the servant answer, and come running down the hallway. Dashing the screen aside, I sprang out.

Bock Gee stood now by the railing of the balcony, a dim figure silhouetted in the faint light of the lanterns. Again I saw the glitter of that long blade. Then Bock Gee was gone.

Far below, there was a rush of slippered feet. I remember Chen Wan stood at my elbow as I bent over the railing and looked down. Shadowy forms were gathering about something that lay in the cobbled alley. There was a hushed silence. I heard again the voices in the pool-room, the click of rolling balls. Then broke the tumult of scurrying feet and wild cries.

"Well, Minturn," said Chen Wan, weeks later, as we lingered one evening over our tea and almond cakes, "I suppose it was all for the best. Bock Gee was a doomed man."

"Certainly," I agreed. "In fact, I thought it rather fortunate the way he solved your problem for you."

"True enough," smiled Chen, "but the funny thing is this: The Brotherhood, of course, thinks that I lured Bock Gee to my balcony, killed him, and threw him in the alley. And they cannot understand how I persuaded you, a white man of good repute, to stand before the police with me and swear that you saw Bock Gee kill himself!"

NEXT MONTH . . .

EQMM will present its United Nations issue, including stories from the four corners of the world — from all six continents. Europe will be represented by F. Tennyson Jesse (England), Georges Simenon (Belgium), Gabriele D'Annunzio (Italy), Ferenc Molnar (Hungary), Karel Capek (Czechoslovakia), Victor Palla (Portugal), Maurice Level (France), and Anton Chekhov (Russia); Africa by Arthur Williams; Asia by H. T. Alfon (Philippines); South America by Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina); Australia by A. E. Martin; and North America by Edgar D. Smith (Canada), and Cornell Woolrich (United States). *EQMM* for August — All Nations anthology!

At the end of our editorial comments prefacing Rex Stout's "Help Wanted, Male," in the February 1948 issue of EQMM, we promised you more about the man behind Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin, more about the dynamic, outspoken Rex Stout himself. A militant Quaker, Rex Todhunter Stout was born in Noblesville, Indiana, on December 1, 1886. When he was still a small child, his parents moved to Wakarusa, Kansas, where he received his early education in a little country school in Shawnee County. At the age of thirteen he was state spelling champion. Later he graduated from nearby Topeka High School as the class poet. Followed a short stay at the University of Kansas, a period of "bumming," and a hitch in the Navy where he served as pay yeoman on President Theodore Roosevelt's yacht, the "Mayflower." From 1908 to 1912 he roamed far and wide over these United States, working as a cook, clerk, bellhop, motorman, plumber's assistant, and hotel manager. As the result of his audacious initiative (a fabulous story in itself) Rex Stout turned to writing and spent six years squandering the proceeds on symphony concerts, opera, the theatre, and "investigating the woman question." Seeking a more solid financial foundation, he then switched to business and in the next ten years invented a school banking system (the Educational Thrift Service), installed it in four hundred towns and cities from coast to coast, and in 1927, having acquired a modest fortune, withdrew from the arena of business and went to Paris to write.

And he did write — four psychological novels which critics called "glowingly articulate." Then one morning Rex Stout woke up to find himself, if not famous, caught in the market crash of the thirties and forced to turn, quickly and decisively, to a form of expression more lucrative than the probing in print of the dark regions of psychoses. In 1934 he created Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin, and the rest is homicidal history.

Mr. Stout now makes his home with his wife and daughters on a farm in New York State. He says that he loves "books, food, music, people who work, and heated arguments" (he can say that again!). He dislikes "politicians, preachers, genteel persons, people who do not work, closed minds, movies, loud noises, and oiliness." Gilbert Gabriel once described Rex Stout as a "lean, hard, incorrigibly active optimist with Ancient Mariner eyes and a patriarchal beard."

In his most recent letter to your Editor, Mr. Stout apologized for his

delay in writing because he had been "very busy pruning cows' tails." A noted wit, a great traveler, a superb after-dinner speaker, and a famous epicure, Mr. Stout reminded us that none of his biographical write-ups have ever mentioned the fact that he is "the best d—— gardener south of the North Pole"; and indeed it is well-known that in prewar days Rex Stout, emulating Wilkie Collins's Sergeant Cuff whose hobby was roses and anticipating his own Nero Wolfe whose hobby is orchids, had more than a local reputation for growing the rarer varieties of roses and iris. Truth is not only stranger than fiction, it inspires it . . .

MURDER ON TUESDAY

by REX STOUT

Among the kinds of men I have a prejudice against are the ones named Eugene. There's no use asking me why, because I admit it's a prejudice. It may be that when I was in kindergarten out in Ohio a man named Eugene stole candy from me, but, if so, I have forgotten all about it. For all practical purposes, it is merely one facet of my complex character that I do not like men named Eugene.

That, and that alone, accounted for my offish attitude when Mr. and Mrs. Eugene R. Poor called at Nero Wolfe's office that Tuesday afternoon in October, because I had never seen or heard of the guy before, and neither had Wolfe.

The appointment had been made by phone that morning, so I was prejudiced before I ever got a look at him. The look hadn't swayed me much one way or the other. He wasn't too old to remember what his wife had given him on his fortieth birthday, but neither was he young enough to be still looking forward to it. Nothing about him stood out. His face was taken at random out of stock, with no alterations. Gray herringbone suits like his were that afternoon being bought in stores from San Diego to Bangor. Really, his only distinction was that they had named him Eugene.

In spite of which I was regarding him with polite curiosity, for he had just told Nero Wolfe that he was going to be murdered by his partner, a man named Conroy Blaney.

I was sitting at my desk in the room Nero Wolfe used for an office in his home on West 35th Street, and Wolfe was behind his desk, arranged in a chair that had been especially constructed to support up to a quarter of a ton, which was not utterly beyond the limits of possibility. Eugene R. Poor was in the red leather chair a short distance beyond Wolfe's desk, with a little table smack against its

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right arm for the convenience of clients in writing checks. Mrs. Poor was on a spare between her husband and me.

I might mention that I was not aware of any prejudice against Mrs. Poor. For one thing, there was no reason to suppose that her name was Eugene. For another, there were several reasons to suppose that her fortieth birthday would not come before mine, though she was good and mature. She had by no means struck me dumb, but there are people who seem to improve a room just by being in it.

Naturally, Wolfe was scowling. He shook his head, moving it a full half-inch right and left, which was, for him, a frenzy of negation.

"No, sir," he said emphatically. "I suppose two hundred men and women have sat in that chair, Mr. Poor, and tried to hire me to keep someone from killing them." His eyes switched to me. "How many, Archie?"

I said, to oblige him, "Two hundred and nine."

"Have I taken the jobs?"

"No, sir. Never."

He wiggled a finger at Eugene. "For two million dollars a year you can make it fairly difficult for a man to kill you. That's about what it costs to protect a president or a king, and even so, consider the record. Of course, if you give up all other activity it can be done more cheaply, say, forty thousand a year. A cave in a mountainside, never emerging, with six guards and a staff to suit —"

Eugene was trying to get something in. He finally did: "I don't expect you to keep him from killing me. That's not what I came for."

"Then what the deuce did you come for?"

"To keep him from getting away with it." Eugene cleared his throat. "I was trying to tell you. I agree that you can't stop him; I don't see how anybody can. Sooner or later. He's a clever man." His voice took on bitterness: "Too damn' clever for me, and I wish I'd never met him. Sure, I know a man can kill a man if he once decides to, but Con Blaney is so damn' clever that it isn't a question whether he can kill me or not; the question is whether he can manage it so that he is in the clear. I'm afraid he can. I would bet he can. And I don't want him to."

His wife made a little noise, and he stopped to look at her. Then he shook his head at her as if she had said something, took a cigar from his vest pocket, removed the band, inspected first one end and then the other to decide which was which, got a gadget from another vest pocket and snipped one of the ends, and lit up. He no sooner had it lit than it slipped out of his mouth, bounced on his thigh, and landed on the rug. He retrieved the cigar from the floor, and got his teeth sunk in it.

"So," I thought to myself, "you're not so doggone calm about getting murdered as you were making out to be."

"So I came," he told Wolfe, "to

give you the facts, to get the facts down, and to pay you five thousand dollars to see that he doesn't manage it that way." The cigar between his teeth interfered with his talking, and he took it out of his mouth. "If he kills me I'll be dead. I want someone to know about it."

Wolfe's eyes had gone half shut. "But why pay me five thousand dollars in advance? Wouldn't someone know about it? Your wife, for instance?"

Eugene nodded. "I've thought about that. I've thought it all out. What if he kills her, too? I have no idea how he'll try to work it, or when, and who is there besides my wife whom I can absolutely trust? I'm not taking any chances. Of course, I thought of the police, but judging from my own experience, a couple of burglaries down at the shop, and, you know, the experiences of a businessman, I'm not sure they'd even remember I'd been there if it happened in a year or maybe two years." He stuck his cigar in his mouth, puffed twice, and took it out again. "What's the matter — don't you want five thousand dollars?"

Wolfe said gruffly, "I wouldn't get five thousand. This is October. As my income now stands, I'll keep about ten per cent of any additional receipts after paying taxes. Out of five thousand, five hundred would be mine. If Mr. Blaney is as clever as you think he is, I wouldn't consider trying to uncover him on a murder for five hundred dollars." He stopped and opened his eyes to glare at the wife. "May I ask, madam, what you are looking so pleased about?"

Wolfe couldn't stand to see a woman look pleased.

Mrs. Poor was regarding him with a little smile of obvious approval. "Because," she said, in a voice that was pleased too, and a nice voice, "I need help, and I think you're going to help me. I don't approve of this. I didn't want my husband to come here."

"Indeed. Where did you want him to go — to the Atlantic Detective Agency?"

"Oh, no; if I had been in favor of his going to any detective at all, of course it would have been Nero Wolfe. But — May I explain?"

Wolfe glanced at the clock on the wall. Three-forty. In twenty minutes he would be leaving for the plant-rooms on the roof, to indulge in his favorite hobby — monkeying around with orchids. Besides being a champion eater and drinker, Wolfe is the best orchid grower in New York. He said curtly, "I have eighteen minutes."

Eugene put in, with a determined voice, "Then I'm going to use them—" But his wife smiled him out of it. She went on to Wolfe: "It won't take that long. My husband and Mr. Blaney have been business partners for ten years. They own the firm of Blaney & Poor, manufacturers of novelties — you know — they make things like matches that won't strike and chairs with rubber legs and bottled drinks that taste like soap —"

"Good God," Wolfe muttered.

She ignored it. "It's the biggest firm in the business. Mr. Blaney gets the ideas and handles the production — he's a genius at it — and my husband handles the business part, sales and so on. But Mr. Blaney is really just about too conceited to live, and now that the business is a big success he thinks my husband isn't needed, and he wants him to get out and take twenty thousand dollars for his half. Of course, it's worth a great deal more than that — at least ten times as much — and my husband won't do it. Mr. Blaney is very conceited, and also he will not let anything stand in his way. The argument has gone on and on, until now my husband is convinced that Mr. Blaney is capable of doing anything to get rid of him."

"Of killing him. And you don't agree."

"Oh, no. I do agree. I think Mr. Blaney would stop at nothing."

"Has he made threats?"

She shook her head. "He isn't that kind. He doesn't make threats; he just goes ahead."

"Then why didn't you want your husband to come to me?"

"Because he's simply too stubborn to live." She smiled at Eugene to take out any sting, and back at Wolfe. "There's a clause in the partnership agreement — they signed it when they started the business — that says if either one of them dies, the other one owns the whole thing. That's another reason why my husband thinks Mr. Blaney will kill him, and I think so, too. But what my husband wants is to make sure Mr. Blaney gets caught — that's how stubborn he is — and what I want is for my husband to stay alive."

"Now, Martha," Eugene put in, "I came here to —"

So her name was Martha. I had no prejudice against women named Martha.

She kept the floor. "It's like this," she appealed to Wolfe. "My husband thinks that Mr. Blaney is determined to kill him if he can't get what he wants any other way, and I think so, too. You, yourself, think that if a man is determined to kill another man nothing can stop him. So isn't it perfectly obvious? My husband has over two hundred thousand dollars saved up outside the business, about half of it in bonds. He can get another twenty thousand from Mr. Blaney for his half of the business —"

"It's worth twenty times that," Eugene said savagely, showing real emotion for the first time.

"Not to you if you're dead," she snapped back at him, and went on to Wolfe: "With the income from that we could live more than comfortably — and happily. I hope my husband loves me — I *hope* he does — and I know I love him." She leaned forward in her chair. "That's why I came along today — I thought maybe you would help me persuade him. It isn't as if I wouldn't stand by my husband in a fight if there was any chance of his winning. But is there any sense in being so stubborn if you can't possibly win? If, instead of winning,

you will probably die? Now, does that make sense? I ask you, Mr. Wolfe — you are a wise and clever and able man — what would you do if you were in my husband's position?"

Wolfe muttered, "You put that as a question?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well. Granting that you have described the situation correctly, I would kill Mr. Blaney."

She looked startled. "But that's silly." She frowned. "Of course you're joking, and it's no joke."

"I'd kill him in a second," Eugene told Wolfe, "if I thought I could get away with it. I suppose *you* could, but I couldn't."

"And I'm afraid," Wolfe said politely, "you couldn't hire me for that." He glanced at the clock. "I would advise against your consulting even your wife. An undetected murder is strictly a one-man job. Her advice, sir, is sound. Are you going to take it?"

"No." Eugene sounded as stubborn as she said he was.

"Are you going to kill Mr. Blaney?"

"No."

"Do you still want to pay me five thousand dollars?"

"Yes, I do."

Mrs. Poor, who was rapidly becoming Martha to me, tried to horn in, but bigger and louder people than her had failed at that when orchid time was at hand. Wolfe ignored her and went on to Mr. Poor:

"I advise you against that, too, under the circumstances. Here are the circumstances — Archie, take your notebook. Make a receipt reading, 'Received from Eugene R. Poor five thousand dollars, in return for which I agree, in case he dies within one year, to give the police the information he has given me today, and to take any further action that may seem to me advisable.' Sign my name and initial it as usual. Get all details from Mr. Poor." Wolfe pushed back his chair and got the levers of his muscles in position to hoist the bulk.

Eugene's eyes were moist with tears, but they came, not from emotion, but from smoke from his second cigar. In fact, throughout the interview his nervousness seemed to concentrate on his cigar. He had dropped it twice, and the smoke seemed determined to go down the wrong way and make him cough. But he was able to speak, all right.

"That's no good," he objected. "You don't even say what kind of action. At least, you ought to say —"

"I advised you against it under the circumstances." Wolfe was on his feet. "Those, sir, are the circumstances. That's all I'll undertake. Suit yourself." He started to move.

But Eugene had another round to fire. His hand went in a pocket and came out full of folded money. "I hadn't mentioned," he said, displaying the pretty objects, "that I brought it in cash. Speaking of income tax, if you're up to the ninety per cent bracket, getting it in cash would make it a lot more —"

Wolfe's look stopped him. "Pfui,"

Wolfe said. He hadn't had as good a chance to show off for a month. "I am not a common cheat, Mr. Poor. Not that I am a saint. Given adequate provocation, I might conceivably cheat a man — or a woman, or even a child. But you are suggesting that I cheat, not a man or woman or child, but a hundred and forty million of my fellow citizens. Bah."

We stared at his back as he left, as he knew we would, and in a moment we heard the sound of his elevator door opening.

I flipped to a fresh page in my notebook and turned to Eugene and Martha. "To refresh your memory," I said, "the name is Archie Goodwin. Among other things, I'm Wolfe's assistant, and I'm the one that has been doing the work around here for fifty years, more or less. I am also, Mr. Poor, an admirer of your wife."

He nearly dropped his cigar again. "You're what?"

"I admire your wife as an advice giver. She has learned one of the most important rules — that; far as life falls short of perfection, it is more fun outside the grave than in it. With over two hundred thousand bucks —"

"I've had enough advice," he said as if he meant it. "My mind is made up."

"Okay." I got the notebook in position. "Give me everything you think we'll need. First, basic facts. Home and business addresses?"

It took close to an hour, so it was nearly five o'clock when they left. I found Eugene irritating and therefore kept my prejudice intact. I wondered later what difference it would have made in my attitude if I had known that in a few hours he would be dead. Even if you take the line that he had it coming to him, which would be easy to justify, at least it would have made the situation more interesting. But during that hour, as far as I knew, they were just a couple of white-livers, scared stiff by a false alarm named Blaney, so it was merely another job.

I was still typing from my notes when, at six o'clock, after the regulation two hours in the plant-rooms, Wolfe came down to the office. He got fixed in his chair, rang for Fritz to bring beer, and demanded, "Did you take that man's money?"

I grinned at him. Up to his old tricks. I had been a civilian again for only a week, and here he was, already treating me like a hireling, just as he had for years, acting as if I had never been a colonel, as, in fact, I hadn't, but anyway I had been a major.

I asked him, "What do you think? If I say I took it you'll claim that your attitude as you left plainly indicated that he had insulted you and you wouldn't play. If I say I refused it you'll claim I've done you out of a fee. Which do you prefer?"

He abandoned it. "Do your typing. I like to hear you typing. If you are typing you can't talk."

To humor him I typed, which as it turned out was just as well, since that neat list of facts was going to be

needed before bedtime. It was finished when Fritz entered at eight o'clock to announce dinner.

Back in the office, where the clock said 9:42, I was just announcing my intention of catching a movie by the tail at the Rialto, when the phone rang. It was our old friend, Inspector Cramer, whose voice I hadn't heard for weeks, asking for Wolfe. Wolfe picked up his receiver, and I stuck to mine so as to get it firsthand.

"Wolfe? . . . Cramer. I've got a paper here, taken from the pocket of a dead man, a receipt for five thousand dollars, signed by you, dated today. It says you have information to give the police if he dies. All right, he's dead. I don't ask you to come up here, because I know you wouldn't, and I'm too busy to go down there. What's the information?"

Wolfe grunted. "What killed him?"

"An explosion. Just give —"

"Did it kill his wife too?"

"Naw, she's okay, only overcome, you know. Just give —"

"I haven't got the information. Mr. Goodwin has it. Archie?"

I spoke up: "It would take quite a while, Inspector, and I've got it all typed. I can run up there —"

"All right; come ahead. The Poor apartment on Eighty-fourth Street. The number is —"

"I know the number. I know everything. Just rest till I get there."

In the living-room of an apartment on the sixth floor, on 84th Street near Amsterdam Avenue, I stood and looked down at what was left of Eugene Poor. All I really recognized was the gray herringbone suit and the shirt and tie, on account of what the explosion had done to his face, and also on that account I didn't look much, for while I may not be a softy, I see no point in prolonged staring at a face that has entirely stopped being a face.

I asked Sergeant Purley Stebbins, who was sticking close by me, apparently to see that I didn't swipe Eugene's shoes, "You say a cigar did that to him?"

Purley nodded. "Yeah; so the wife says. He lit a cigar, and it blew up."

"Huh. I don't believe it. . . . Yes, I guess I do, too, if she says so. They make novelties. Now, that's a novelty."

I looked around. The room was full of what you would expect — assorted snoops, all doing the chores, from print collectors up to inspectors, or at least one inspector, namely, Cramer himself, who sat at a table near a wall reading the script I had brought him. Most of them I knew, at least by sight, but there was one complete stranger. She was in a chair in a far corner, being questioned by a homicide dick named Rowcliff. Being trained to observe details even when under a strain, I had caught at a glance some of her outstanding characteristics, such as youth, shapeliness, and shallow depressions at the temples, which happen to appeal to me.

I aimed a thumb in her direction and asked Purley, "Bystander, wife's sister, or what?"

He shook his head. "God knows. She came to call just after we got here, and we want to know what for."

I strolled over to the corner and stopped alongside them, and the girl and the dick looked up. "Excuse me," I told her; "When you get through here will you kindly call on Nero Wolfe at this address?" I handed her a card. The temples were even better close up. "Mr. Wolfe is going to solve this murder."

Rowcliff snarled. He always snarled. "Get away from here, and stay away."

Actually, he was helpless, because the inspector had sent for me, and he knew it. I ignored him and told the temples, "If this person takes that card away from you, it's in the phone book — Nero Wolfe," left them, and crossed over to Cramer at the table, dodging photographers and other scientists on the way.

Cramer didn't look up, so I asked the top of his head, "Where's Mrs. Poor?"

He growled, "Bedroom."

"I want to see her."

"The hell you do." He jiggled the sheets I had brought him. "Sit down."

I sat down and said, "I want to see our client."

"So you've got a client?"

"Sure, we have. Didn't you see that receipt?"

He grunted. "Give her a chance. I am. Let her get herself together. . . . Don't touch that!"

I was only moving a hand to point at a box of cigars there on the table, with the lid closed. I grinned at him. "The more the merrier. I mean, fingerprints. But if that's the box the loaded one came from, you ought to satisfy my curiosity. He smoked two cigars this afternoon at the office."

Cramer shot me a glance, then got out his penknife and opened the lid and lifted the paper flap. It was a box of 25, and 24 of them were still there. Only one gone. I inspected at close range, sat back, and nodded. "They're the same. They not only look it, but the bands say Alta Vista. There would be two of those bands still in the ash-tray down at the office if Fritz wasn't so neat." I squinted again at the array in the box. "They certainly look kosher. Do you suppose they're all loaded?"

"I don't know. The laboratory can answer that one." He closed the box with the tip of his knife. "Damn murders, anyhow." He tapped the papers with his finger. "This is awful pat. The wife let out a hint or two, and I've sent for Blaney. I hope to God it's a wrap-up, and maybe it is. How did Poor seem this afternoon, scared, nervous, what?"

"Mostly stubborn. Mind made up."

"What about the wife?"

"Stubborn too. She wanted him to get out from under and go on breathing. She thought they could be as happy as larks on the income from a measly quarter of a million."

The next twenty minutes was a record — Inspector Cramer and me conversing without a single ugly remark. It lasted that long only because of various interruptions from his

army. The last one, toward the end, was from Rowcliff walking up to the table to say, "Do you want to talk to this young woman, Inspector?"

"How do I know? What about her?"

"Her name is Helen Vardis. She's an employee of Poor's firm, Blaney & Poor — been with them four years. At first she showed signs of hysteria and then calmed down. First she said she just happened to come here. Then she saw what that was worth and said she came to see Poor by appointment, at his request, on a confidential matter, and wants us to promise not to tell Blaney, or she would lose her job."

"What confidential matter?"

"She won't say. That's what I've been working on."

"Work on it some more."

There was a commotion at the outer door, and it came on through the foyer into the living-room in the shape of a municipal criminologist gripping the arm of a wild-eyed young man who apparently didn't want to be gripped. They were both talking, or at least making noises. It was hard to tell whether they were being propelled by the young man pulling or the cop pushing.

Cramer boomed, "Doyle! What the hell? Who is that?"

The young man goggled around, declaiming, "I have a right — Oh! There you are."

She said, as if she didn't need any information from snakes or rats, "You didn't lose any time, did you? Now you think you can have her, don't you?"

He held the stare, showing no reaction except clamping his jaw, and their audience sat tight. In a moment he seemed to realize it was rather a public performance, and his head started to pivot, doing a slow circle, taking in the surroundings. It was a good, thorough job of looking, without any waver or pause, so far as I could see, even when it hit the most sensational item, namely, the corpse. During the process his eyes lost their wild look entirely, and when he spoke his voice was cool and controlled. It was evident that his mental operations were enough in order for him to pick the most intelligent face in the bunch, since it was to me he put the question:

"Are you in charge here?"

I replied, "No. This one. Inspector Cramer."

He strode across and looked Cramer in the eye and made a speech: "My name is Joe Groll. I work for Blaney & Poor, factory foreman. I followed that girl, Helen Vardis, when she left home tonight, because I wanted to know where she was going, and she came here. The police cars and cops going in and out made me want to ask questions, and finally I got the answer that a man named Poor had been murdered, so I wanted to find out. Where is Blaney? Conroy Blaney, the partner —"

"I know," Cramer said, looking disgusted. Naturally he was disgusted, since what he had hoped would be a wrap-up was spilling out in various directions. "We've sent for Blaney,

Groll. Why were you following —?"

"That isn't true!"

More diversions. Helen Vardis had busted out of her corner to join the table group, close enough to Joe Groll to touch him, but they weren't touching. Instead of resuming their staring match, they were both intent on Cramer.

Looking even more disgusted, Cramer asked her, "What isn't true?"

"That he was following me!" Helen was mad clear to her temples and pretty as a picture. "Why should he follow me? He came here to —" She bit it off sharp.

"Yeah," Cramer said encouragingly. "To what?"

"I don't know! But I do know who killed Mr. Poor! It was Martha Davis!"

"That helps. Who is Martha Davis?"

Joe Groll said, giving information again, "She means Mrs. Poor. That was her name when she worked in the factory, before she got married. She means Mrs. Poor killed her husband. That's on account of jealousy. She's crazy."

A quiet but energetic voice came from a new direction: "She certainly is."

It was Martha, who emerged from a door at the far end and approached the table. She was pale and didn't seem any too sure of her leg action, but she made her objective all right. She spoke to the girl, with no sign of violent emotion that I could detect, not even resentment: "Helen, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I think you will be when you have calmed down and thought things over. You have no right or reason to talk like that. You accuse me of killing my husband? Why?"

Very likely Helen would have proceeded to tell her why, but at that moment a cop entered from the foyer escorting a stranger. Cramer motioned for them to back out.

But the stranger was not a backer-out. He came on straight to the table and, since the arrangement showed plainly that Cramer was it, addressed the inspector: "I'm Conroy. Where's Gene Poor?"

Not that he was aggressive or in any way overwhelming. His voice was a tenor squeak and it fitted his looks. I could have picked him up and set him down again without grunting. He had an undersized nose and not much chin, and he was going bald. In spite of all those handicaps his sudden appearance had a remarkable effect. Martha Poor simply turned and left the room. The expressions on the faces of Helen Vardis and Joe Groll changed completely; they went deadpan in one second flat. I saw at once that there would be no more blurting.

As for Blaney, he looked around, saw the body of his partner on the floor, stepped toward it and gazed down at it, and squeaked, "Good heavens! Good heavens! Who did it?" . . .

Next morning at eleven o'clock, when Wolfe came down to the office after his two-hour session up in the

plant-rooms, I made my report. He took it, as usual, leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed, with no visible sign of consciousness. The final chapter was the details given me by Martha Poor, with whom I had managed to have a talk around midnight by pressing Cramer on the client angle and wearing him down. I gave it to Wolfe:

"They came here yesterday in their own car. When they left here, a little before five, they drove to Madison Square Garden and got a program of the afternoon rodeo performance, the reason for that being he had needed to explain his absence from the office and, not wanting Blaney to know that he was coming to see you, he had said he was going to the rodeo, and wanted to be able to answer questions if he was asked about it. Then they drove up to Westchester. Conroy Blaney has a place up there, a shack in the hills where he lives and spends his evenings and weekends thinking up novelties, and they had a date to see him there and discuss things.

"Mrs. Poor had persuaded Poor to go, thinking they might reach an agreement, but Poor hadn't wanted to, and on the way up he balked, so they stopped at a place near Scarsdale, Monty's Tavern, to debate. Poor won the debate. He wouldn't go. She left him at the tavern and went on to Blaney's place alone. The date was for six-fifteen and she got there right on the dot. . . . Are you awake?"

He grunted.

I went on: "Blaney wasn't there. He lives alone, and the doors were locked. She waited around and got cold. At ten minutes to seven she beat it back to the tavern. She and Poor ate dinner there, then drove back to town, put the car in the garage, and went home. Poor had had no cigar after dinner because they hadn't had his brand at the tavern and he wouldn't smoke anything else. He has been smoking Alta Vistas for years, ten to fifteen a day. So he hung up his hat and opened a fresh box. She didn't see him do it because she was in the bathroom. She heard the sound of the explosion — not very loud — and ran out, and there he was. She phoned downstairs, and the elevator man and hall man came and phoned for a doctor and the police. . . . Are you still awake?"

He grunted again.

"Okay. That's it. When I returned to the living-room everyone had left, including Poor's leftovers. Some friend had come to spend the night, and of course there was a cop out in the hall. When I got home you were in bed snoring."

He had long ago quit bothering to deny that he snored. Now he didn't bother about anything, but just sat there. I resumed with the plant records. Noon came and went, and still he was making no visible effort to earn five thousand dollars, or even five hundred. Finally he heaved a sigh, almost opened his eyes, and told me, "You say the face was unrecognizable."

"Yes, sir. As I described it."

"From something concealed in a cigar. Next to incredible. Phone Mr. Cramer. Tell him it is important that the identity of the corpse be established beyond question. Also, I want to see a photograph of Mr. Poor while still intact."

I goggled at him. "For God's sake, what do you think? That she doesn't know her own husband? She came home with him. Now, really. The old insurance gag? Your mind's in a rut. I will not phone Mr. Cramer merely to put myself on the receiving end of a horse laugh."

"Be quiet. Let me alone. Phone Mr. Cramer."

At lunch he discussed Yugoslav politics. That was all right, because he never talked business at the table, but when, back in the office, he went through the elaborate operations of getting himself settled with the atlas, I decided to apply spurs and sink them deep.

I arose and confronted him and announced, "I resign."

He muttered testily without looking up, "Nonsense. Do your work."

"No, sir. I'm going upstairs to pack. If you're too lazy to wiggle a finger, very well, that's not news. But you could at least send me to the Public Library to look up the genealogy of—"

"Confound it!" He glared at me. "I engaged to give that information to the police, and have done so. Also to take any further action that might seem to me advisable. I have done that."

"Do you mean you're through with the case?"

"Certainly not. I haven't even started, because there's nothing to start on. Mr. Cramer may do the job himself, or he may not. I hope he does. If you don't want to work, go to a movie."

I went upstairs to my room and tried to read a book, knowing it wouldn't work, because I can never settle down when a murder case is on. So I returned to the office and rattled papers, but even that didn't faze him. At four o'clock, when he went up to the plant-rooms, I went to the corner and got afternoon papers, but there was nothing in them but the usual stuff.

When he came down again at six it was more of the same, and I went out for a walk to keep from throwing a chair at him, and stayed until dinnertime. After dinner I went to a movie, and when I got home, a little after eleven, and found him sitting drinking beer and reading a magazine, I went upstairs without saying good night.

Next morning, Thursday, there wasn't a peep out of him before nine o'clock, the time he went up to the damn' orchids.

I read the papers and had more coffee.

When Wolfe came down to the office at eleven I greeted him with a friendly suggestion.

"Look," I said; "you're an expert on murder. But this Poor murder bores you because you've already

collected your fee. So how about this?"

I spread the morning *Gazette* on his desk and indicated. "Absolutely Grade A. Man's naked body found in an old orchard off a lonely lane four miles from White Plains, head crushed to a pancake, apparently by a car running square over him. It offers many advantages to a great detective like you. It might be Hitler, since his body has never been found. It is in a convenient neighborhood, easily reached by train, or auto, electric lights and city gas. The man has been dead at least thirty-six hours, counting from now, so it has the antique quality you like, with the clues all —"

In another minute I would have had him sputtering with fury, but the doorbell rang. "Study it," I told him, and went to the hall and the front and, following routine, fingered the curtain edge aside for a look through the glass panel.

After one brief glance I went back to the office and told Wolfe casually, "It's only Cramer. To hell with him. Since he's working on the Poor case and you're not interested —"

"Archie. Confound you. Bring him in."

The bell was ringing again, and that irritates me, so I went and got him. He was wearing his raincoat and his determined look. I relieved him of the former in the hall and let him take the latter on into the office.

When I joined them, Cramer was lowering himself into the red leather chair and telling Wolfe, "I dropped in on my way uptown because I thought it was only fair, since you gave me that information. I think I'm going to arrest your client on a charge of murder."

I sat down and felt at home.

Wolfe grunted. He leaned back in his chair, got his fingertips touching in the locality of his midriff, and said offensively, "Nonsense. You can't arrest my client on any charge whatever. My client is dead. By the way, is he? Has the corpse been properly identified?"

Cramer nodded. "Certainly. With a face like that it's routine. Barber, dentist, and doctor — they're the experts. Why, what did you think it was, an insurance fake?"

"I didn't think. Then you can't arrest my client."

"Goodwin says Mrs. Poor is your client."

"Mr. Goodwin is impulsive. You read that receipt. So you're going to charge Mrs. Poor?"

"I think I am."

"Indeed."

Cramer scowled at him. "Don't 'indeed' me. Damn it, didn't I take the trouble to stop and tell you about it?"

"Go ahead and tell me."

"Very well." Cramer screwed up his lips, deciding where to start. "First, I'd appreciate an answer to a question. What is this identity angle, anyhow? There's not the slightest doubt it was Poor. Not only the corpse itself — other things, like the elevator man who took them up when they came home, and the people up at the tavern

where they ate dinner. He was known there. And what did you want a photograph for?"

"Did you bring one?"

"No. Apparently there aren't any. I wasn't interested after the dentist and barber verified the corpse, but I understand the papers had to settle for sketches drawn from descriptions. One reason I came here, what's your idea doubting the identity of the corpse?"

Wolfe shook his head. "Evidently silly, since you're ready to take Mrs. Poor. You were telling me —"

"Yeah. Of course, Goodwin told you about the box of cigars."

"Something."

"Well, that was it, all right. Poor smoked about a box every two days, boxes of twenty-five. He bought them ten boxes at a time, from a place on Varick Street near his office and factory. There were four unopened boxes in his apartment and they're okay. The one he started on when he got home Tuesday night — the twenty-four left in it are all loaded. Any one of them would have killed him two seconds after he lit it."

Wolfe muttered, "That's hard to believe — inside a cigar —"

"Right. I thought so, too. The firm of Blaney & Poor has been making trick cigars for years, but they're harmless; all they do is *phut*, and make you jump. What's in these twenty-four is anything but harmless — a special kind of instantaneous fuse the size of an ordinary thread, and a very special explosive capsule that was invented during the war and is still on the secret list. Even this is confidential; it's made by the Becker Products Corporation, and their men and the FBI are raising hell trying to find out how this murderer got hold of them. That's not for publication."

"I'm not a publisher."

"Okay."

"Of course," Wolfe remarked, "the Alta Vista people deny all knowledge."

"Sure. We let them analyze five of the twenty-four, after removing the fuses and capsules, and they say the fillers are theirs but the wrappers are not. They say whoever sliced them open and inserted the things and rewrapped them was an expert, and anyhow anybody could see that.

"Now, then. There are six people connected with Blaney & Poor who are good at making trick cigars. Four of them are mixed up in this. Helen Vardis is one of their most highly skilled workers. Joe Groll is the foreman and can do anything. Blaney is the best of all; he shows them how. And Mrs. Poor worked there for four years when she was Martha Davis, up to two years ago, when she married Poor."

Wolfe shuddered. "Six people good at making trick cigars. Couldn't the murder have been a joint enterprise? Couldn't you convict all of them?"

"I don't appreciate jokes about murder," Cramer said morosely. "I wish I could. It's a defect of character. As for getting the loaded cigars into Poor's apartment, that also is wide open. He always had them delivered

to his office, and the package would lie around there, sometimes as long as two or three days, until he took it home. So anybody might have substituted the loaded box. . . . But now, about Mrs. Poor. How do you like this? Naturally we gave the cigars and the box everything we had. It was a very neat job. But underneath the cigars we found two human hairs, one five inches long and one six and a half inches. We have compared them with hairs taken from various heads. Those two came from the head of Mrs. Poor. Unquestionably. So I think I'll charge her."

Wolfe's eyes half closed. "I wouldn't do it if I were you, Mr. Cramer."

"Oh." He glared at Wolfe. "You wouldn't."

"No, sir. Let me put it this way." Wolfe maneuvered himself into position for an uplift, and got to his feet. "You have her on trial. The hairs have been placed in evidence. I am the defense attorney. I am speaking to the jury."

Wolfe fixed his eyes on me. "Ladies and gentlemen, I respect your intelligence. The operation of turning those cigars into deadly bombs has been described to you as one requiring the highest degree of skill and the minutest attention. Deft fingers and perfect eyesight were essential. Since the slightest irregularity about the appearance of that box of cigars might have attracted the attention of a veteran smoker, you can imagine the anxious scrutiny with which each cigar was inspected as it was arranged in the box. And you can realize how incredible it is that such a person, so intently engaged on anything and everything the eye could see, could possibly have been guilty of such atrocious carelessness as to leave two of the hairs of her head in that box with those cigars. Ladies and gentlemen, I appeal to your intelligence! I put it to you that those hairs, far from being evidence that Martha Poor killed her husband, are, instead, evidence that Martha Poor did not kill her husband!"

Wolfe sat down and muttered, "Then they acquit her, and whom do you charge next?"

Cramer growled, "So she is your client, after all."

"No, sir, she is not. It was Mr. Poor who paid me. You said you came here because you wanted to be fair. *Pfui.* You came here because you had misgivings. You had them because you are not a ninny. A jury would want to know, anyone concerned would want to know, if those hairs did not get in the box through Mrs. Poor's carelessness, how did they get there? Who has had access to Mrs. Poor's head or hairbrush? Manifestly, that is a forlorn hope. The best chance, I would say, is the explosive capsules. Discover the tiniest link between anyone of the Becker Products Corporation and one of your suspects, and you have it —if not your case, at least your certainty. On that I couldn't help, since I am no longer connected with the War Department. You can't convict anybody at all, let alone Mrs. Poor,

without an explanation of how he got the capsules. By the way, what about motive? Mrs. Poor was tired of smelling the smoke from her husband's cigars, perhaps?"

"No. Poor was a tightwad and she wanted money. She gets the whole works plus a hundred thousand insurance. Or, according to that girl, Helen Vardis, she wanted Joe Groll, and now they'll get married."

"Proof?"

"Oh, talk." Cramer looked frustrated. "It goes away back to when Mrs. Poor was working there."

Wolfe frowned. "Another thing, Mr. Cramer, about a jury. As you know, I am strongly disinclined to leave this house for any purpose whatever. I detest the idea of leaving it to go to a courtroom and sit for hours on those wooden abominations they think are seats, and the thing they provide for witnesses is even worse. I would strain a point to avoid that experience; but if it can't be avoided, Mr. Goodwin and I shall have to testify that Mr. Poor sat in that chair and told us of his conviction that Mr. Blaney was going to kill him. You know juries; you know how that would affect them. Suppose again that I am the defense attorney and —"

"Heaven help us," I thought, "he's going to address the jury again."

But I got a break in the form of an excuse to skip it when the doorbell rang. Winking at Cramer as I passed him on my way to the hall, I proceeded to the front door and took a peek. I opened the door just enough to slip through out to the stoop, shut the door behind me, and said, "Hello, let's have a little conference."

Conroy Blaney squeaked at me, "What's the idea?"

I grinned at him amiably. "A policeman named Cramer is in Mr. Wolfe's office having a talk, and I thought maybe you had had enough of him for a while. Unless you're tailing him?"

"Inspector Cramer?"

"Yes," I said. "Are you tailing him?"

"Good heavens, no. I want to see Nero Wolfe."

"Okay; then follow me, and after we are inside don't talk. Get it?"

"I want to see Nero Wolfe immediately."

"Will you follow instructions or won't you? Do you also want to see Cramer?"

"Very well, open the door."

As I inserted my key I was telling myself, murder or not, I am going to be wishing this specimen was big enough to plug in the jaw before this is finished. He did, however, obey orders. I conducted him into the front room, the door connecting it with the office being closed, left him there on a chair, and went back by way of the hall.

"It can wait," I told Wolfe. "The man from Plehn's with the Dendrobiums."

But a minute later Cramer was standing up to go. Knowing how suspicious he was, as well as how many good reasons he had had for being

suspicious on those premises, and also knowing how cops in general love to open doors that don't belong to them just to stick a head in, I escorted him to the front and let him out, then returned to the office and told Wolfe who the company was.

Wolfe frowned. "What does he want?"

"I think he wants to confess. I warn you, his squeak will get on your nerves."

"Bring him in."

I expected to enjoy it, and I did, only it didn't last long. Blaney started off by rejecting the red leather chair and choosing one of the spares, which irritated both of us, since we like our routine. Perched on it, he began, "I was thinking, on my way here, fate has thrown us together, Wolfe. You dominate your field and I dominate mine. We were bound to meet."

It caught Wolfe so completely off balance that he only muttered sarcastically, "Good heavens!"

Blaney nodded with satisfaction. "I knew we would have many things in common. That's my favorite expression, I use it all the time — Good heavens. But you probably want to know where I stand. I would if I were you. I did not come here because of any fear on my own account. There is not the remotest chance of my safety being endangered. But Tuesday evening up at Gene's apartment I heard a man saying to another man — I presume they were detectives — something about Mrs. Poor being Nero Wolfe's client, and in that case Mrs. Poor was as good as out of it, and Nero Wolfe had decided on Blaney, and, if so, Blaney might as well get his leg shaved for the electrode.

"I knew that might be just talk, but I really think it would be a shame for you to make yourself ridiculous, and I don't think you want to. I'm willing to take this trouble. You're not a man to reach a conclusion without reasons. That wouldn't be scientific, and you and I are both scientists. Tell me your reasons, one by one, and I'll prove they're no good. Go ahead."

"Archie." Wolfe looked at me. "Get him out of here."

There wasn't the slightest indication from Blaney that anyone had said anything except him, and I was too fascinated to move.

Blaney went on: "The truth is, you have no reasons. The fact that Gene was afraid I would kill him proves nothing. He was a born coward. I did describe to him some of the methods by which I could kill a man without detection, but that was merely to impress upon him the fact that he continued to own half of the business by my sufferance, and therefore my offer of twenty thousand dollars for his half was an act of generosity. I wouldn't condescend to kill a man. No man is worth that much to me, or that little."

He had performed a miracle. I saw it with my own eyes — Nero Wolfe fleeing in haste from his own office. He had chased many a fellow being from that room, but that was the first time he had ever, himself, been chased. It became evident that he wasn't even

going to risk staying on that floor when the sound was heard of the door of his elevator banging open and shut.

I told Blaney, "Overlook it. He's eccentric."

Blaney said, "So am I."

I nodded. "Geniuses are."

Blaney was frowning. "Does he really think I killed Gene Poor?"

"Yeah. He does now."

"Why now?"

I waved it away. "Forget it. I'm eccentric, too."

The house phone buzzed, and I swung my chair around and took it. It was Wolfe, on his room extension:

"Archie. Is that mân gone?"

"No, sir."

"Get him out of there at once. Phone Saul and tell him to come here as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir."

The line went dead. So he had actually been stirred up enough to blow some dough on the case. Saul Panzer, being merely the best all-round investigator west of Nantucket, not counting me, came to twenty bucks a day plus expenses.

To get Blaney out I nearly had to carry him. . . .

As luck would have it, Saul Panzer was not to be had at the moment. Since he was free-lancing, you never knew. I finally got it that he was out on Long Island on a job, and left word for him to call. He did so around three, and said he would be able to get to the office soon after six o'clock.

It became obvious that to Wolfe, who had been stirred up, money was no object, since he blew another $1.80 on a phone call to Washington. I got it through without any trouble to General Carpenter, head of G2, under whom I had been a major and for whom Wolfe had helped to solve certain problems connected with the war. The favor he asked of Carpenter, and of course got, was a telegram that would open doors at the premises of the Becker Products Corporation.

Not satisfied with that, he opened another valve. At ten minutes to four he said to me, "Archie. Find out whether it seems advisable for me to talk with that man, Joe Groll."

"Yes, sir. Tea leaves? Or there's a palmist over on Seventh —"

"See him and find out."

So after he went up to the plant-rooms I phoned the office of Blaney & Poor and got Joe Groll. No persuasion was required. His tone implied that he would be glad to talk with anybody any time anywhere, after business hours. He would be free at five-thirty. I told him to meet me at Pete's Bar & Grill on 19th Street.

In addition to good whisky, Pete's has booths partitioned to the ceiling, which furnishes privacy. Seated in one of them I was surprised to realize that you could make out a case for calling Joe Groll handsome. They had overdone it a little on the ears, but on the whole he was at least up to grade if not fancy.

After we got our drinks I remarked casually, "As I told you on the phone, I want to discuss this murder. You

may have heard of Nero Wolfe. Poor and his wife came to see him Tuesday afternoon, to tell him Blaney was going to dissolve the partnership by killing Poor."

He nodded. "Yes, I know."

"Oh. The cops told you?"

"No, Martha told me yesterday. Mrs. Poor. She asked me to come up and help about things — the funeral." He made a gesture. "Gosh, one lousy civilian funeral makes more fuss than a thousand dead men over there did."

I nodded. "Sure; the retail business always has more headaches than the wholesale." I sipped my highball. "I don't go for this theory that it was Helen Vardis that killed Poor. Do you?"

"What?" He stared. "What are you talking about? What theory?" His fingers had tightened around his glass.

"Why, this idea that Helen Vardis would do anything for Blaney, God knows why, and she made the cigars for him, and she went there Tuesday night —"

"Well, for Pete's sake." He said that calmly, and then suddenly his voice went up high: "Who thought that one up? Was it that cop Rowcliff? That buzzard? Was it Nero Wolfe? Was it you?"

He sounded next door to hysterical. I sure had pushed the wrong button, or maybe the right one, but I didn't want him sore at me. "It wasn't me," I assured him. "Don't get excited."

He laughed. It sounded bitter but not hysterical. "That's right," he said, "I must remember that — not to get excited. Everybody is very thoughtful. They put you in uniform and teach you what every young man ought to know, and take you across the ocean in the middle of hell, bombs, bullets, shells, flame-throwers; your friends die right against you and bleed down your neck; and after two years of that they bring you home and turn you loose and tell you, now, remember, don't get excited."

He drank his highball, clear to the bottom, and put his glass down.

"I'm all right," he said calmly. "So I am loose again and come back to my job. Don't get excited. Here's what I find. A girl I had been sort of counting on, named Martha Davis, has married the boss, and no one told me. It wasn't her fault, she never promised me anything, not even to write to me; but I had been looking forward to seeing her. Oh, I saw her, because she was in trouble and asked me to help. She thought her husband was going to get killed, and knowing Blaney as I did, I saw no reason to doubt it. I met her places a few times because she wanted to talk it over with me, and she wanted me to watch Blaney. Why am I spilling all this to you? You weren't in the Army."

"I was in the Army," I said, "but I admit nobody bled down my neck. I did what I was told."

"So did I, brother. Didn't we all? Anyhow, I wasn't heartbroken, because she seemed a little older than I had remembered her, and, besides, there was another girl who had been nothing but a kid in the factory, but

she had grown up. I'm not telling you anything the cops don't know. Gosh, the cops are something! That's Helen Vardis. You saw her the other night."

"Yeah, she seemed upset."

"Upset?" He laughed a one-second laugh. "Sure, she was upset. I fell for her like a Sherman tank roaring down a cliff. I certainly hit bottom. . . . All right, I guess I will. Thanks."

That was for the second drink, arriving. He picked it up and swallowed half.

"It is good whisky. . . . She seemed to reciprocate. I guess I was a little leery of all civilians, even her, but she seemed to reciprocate. I can't understand what that guy Poor had that attracted girls, and at his age, too. That I will never understand. First Martha, and then her. I saw her with him in a restaurant. Then I saw them together in his car. Then I followed her from the office and watched her meet him in Fourteenth Street, and they took a taxi and I lost them. Naturally, I sprung it on her, and she the same as told me to go to hell. She refused to explain."

He finished the drink. "So they say don't get excited. The cops told me yesterday and again today, don't get excited. Which one is it that thinks Helen Vardis was helping Blaney? Is it you?"

I shook my head. "I'm not a cop. It's just something I heard and I wondered what you thought of it. In a murder case you're apt to hear anything."

"Why do you listen?"

"Why not? I'm listening to you."

He laughed, somewhat better. "You're a hell of a guy to work on a murder. You don't try to hammer me and you don't try to uncle. Do you want to come along and help me do something?"

"I might if you'd describe it."

"Wait a minute. I want to make a phone call."

He slid along the seat and left the booth. I sipped my highball and lit a cigarette, wondering whether the feel of blood going down his neck had really loosed a screw in him or if he was just temporarily rattled.

In less than five minutes he was back, sliding along the seat again, and announcing, "Blaney's up at his place in Westchester. I phoned to ask him about a job we're doing, but really to find out if he was up there."

"Good. Now we know. Is that where we're going?"

"No." He gazed at his glass. "I thought I drank that — Oh. You had it filled again. Thanks." He took some. "Anyway, that idea about Helen is silly, because it was obviously either Martha or Blaney, if the cops have any brains at all. Martha says she went to Blaney's place in Westchester at six-fifteen Tuesday to keep a date she and Poor had with him, and there was no one there and she waited around until ten minutes to seven. Blaney says he was there all the time, from a quarter to six on, all evening, until he got the phone call from the police that Poor had been killed. So one of them is lying, and the one that's

lying is obviously the one that killed Poor. So it's Blaney."

"Why — because Martha wouldn't lie?"

He frowned at me. "Now, don't smart up. What the hell would she kill him for? She only got him two years ago and he had everything he ever had. Anyway, it was Blaney, and I am fed up with all the gear-grinding, and he is now through with me and I'll be out of a job, so to hell with him. I'm going to see what I can find. On account of the trick cigars the cops wanted to go through the office and factory, and Blaney told them sure, go ahead, go as far as you like, but he didn't tell them about the abditories, and they didn't find them."

"How do you spell it?"

He spelled it: "Abditory. Place to hide things. Blaney says it's a scientific term. The office is full of them. I haven't had a chance before now since Tuesday night, but with him up in Westchester I'm going to take a look. With a nut like Blaney you never can tell. Want to come along?"

"Have you got keys?"

"Keys? I'm the foreman."

"Okay, finish your drink."

He did so, and I got the bill and paid it, and we got our hats and coats and emerged.

When we were on the sidewalk alongside my car I asked him to wait a minute, marched back to where a taxi was parked, jerked the door open, and stuck my head in, and said, "There's no sense in this, Helen. Come on and ride with us."

"Lookit, mister —" the taxi driver began, like a menace. "You'd better get out!"

"Everybody relax," I said pleasantly. "I can't get out because I'm not in; I'm only looking in." I told the temples, "This is absolutely childish. You don't know the first principles of tailing, and this driver you happened to get is, if anything, worse. If you insist on tailing Joe, okay; we'll put him in the cab and let them go ahead, and you ride with me and I'll show you how it's done."

"Yeah?" the menace croaked. "Show her how what's done?"

"See that," I told her. "See the kind of mind he's got."

"You're smart as they come, aren't you?"

"That," I said, "you will learn more about as time goes on. I'm at least smarter than you are if you let that meter continue to tick. Pay him and come on."

She moved, so I stood aside and held the door while she got out. On the sidewalk she faced me and said, "You seem to be in charge of everything, so you pay him."

It was an unpleasant surprise, but I didn't hesitate — first, because I liked the way she was handling herself, and, second, because all expenses would come out of the five grand anyway. So I parted with two bucks, took her elbow and steered her to the sedan, opened the front door and told Joe Groll, "Move over a little. There's room for three."

He did so and I got in and slammed

the door. By the time I had got the engine started and rolled to the corner and turned downtown, neither of them had said a word.

"If I were you folks," I told them, "I would incorporate and call it the Greater New York Mutual Tailing League. I don't see how you keep track of who is following whom on any given day. Of course, if one of you gets convicted of murder that will put a stop to it. You have now, however, the one good reason that I know of for getting married, the fact that a wife can't testify against a husband or vice versa."

I swerved around a pushcart. "The idea is, Helen, we are bound for the Blaney & Poor office to go through the abditories. We think he hid something in them."

"What?" she demanded.

"We don't know. Maybe a detailed estimate in triplicate of what it would cost to kill Poor. Maybe a blueprint of the cigar. Even a rough sketch would help."

"That's ridiculous. You sound to me like a clown."

"Good. It is a well-known fact that clowns have the biggest and warmest hearts on record except mothers and three characters in books by Dickens."

I pulled over to the curb in front of Blaney & Poor's on Varick Street.

That office was no place for a stranger to poke around in. It was on the first floor of a dingy old building in the middle of the block, with part of the factory, so Joe said, in the rear, and the rest on the second floor. As soon as we were inside and had the lights turned on, Helen sat in a chair at a desk and looked disdainful, but as the search went on I noticed she kept her eyes open.

Joe tossed his hat and coat on a chair, got a screwdriver from a drawer, went to the typewriter on the desk Helen was sitting at, used the screwdriver, lifted out the typewriter roller, unscrewed an end of it and turned it vertical, and about four dozen dice rolled out. He held the open end of the roller so the light would hit it right, peered in, put the dice back in and screwed the end on, and put the roller back on the machine.

His fingers were as swift and accurate as any I had ever seen. Even if I had known about it, I would have needed at least ten minutes for the operation; he took about three.

"Trick dice?" I asked him.

"They're just a stock item," he said, and went over to a door in the rear wall, opened it, took it off its hinges, leaned it against a desk, knelt on the floor, removed a strip from the bottom edge of the door; and out came about ten dozen lead pencils.

"Trick pencils?"

"When you press, perfume comes out," he said, and stretched out flat to look into the abditory.

Joe continued his tour of the abditories, which were practically everywhere, in desk lamps, chair legs, water cooler, ashtrays, even one in the metal base of a desk calendar that was on a big desk in the corner.

It was while he had that one open, jiggling things out of it, that I heard him mutter, "This is a new one on me." He walked over and put something on the desk in front of Helen and asked her, "What is that thing, do you know?"

She picked it up, inspected it, and shook her head. "Haven't the faintest idea."

"Let me see." I got up and went over, and Helen handed it to me. The second I saw it I stopped being casual inside, but I tried to keep the outside as before. It was a long, thin metal capsule, about three-quarters of an inch long and not over an eighth of an inch in diameter, smooth all over, with no seam or opening, except at one end, where a thread came through, a dark-brown, medium-sized thread as long as my index finger. I grunted. "Where did you find it?"

"You saw me find it." Joe sounded either irritated or something else. "In that calendar on Blaney's desk."

"Oh, that's Blaney's desk? How many, just this one?"

"No, several." Joe went to Blaney's desk and then came back to us. "Three more. Four altogether."

I took them from him and compared. They were all the same. I regarded Helen's attractive face. She looked interested. I regarded Joe's handsome face if you didn't count the ears. He looked more interested.

"I think," I said, "that it was one of these things that was in the cigar that Poor never smoked. What do you think?"

Joe said, "I think we can damn soon find out. Give me one." He had a gleam in his eye.

I shook my head. "The idea doesn't appeal to me." I looked at my wrist. "Quarter to nine. Mr. Wolfe is in the middle of dinner. The proper thing is for you to take these objects to the police, but they're likely to feel hurt because you didn't tell them about the abditories when they were here. We can't interrupt Mr. Wolfe's dinner, even with a phone call, so I suggest that I buy you a meal somewhere, modest but nutritious, and then we all three go and deliver these gadgets, calendar included, to him."

"You take them to him," Joe said. "I think I'll go home."

"I think I'll go home, too," Helen said.

"No. Nothing doing. You'll just follow each other, and get all confused again. If I take these things to Wolfe without taking you he'll fly into a temper and phone the police to go get you. Not to flatter myself, wouldn't you prefer to come with me?"

Helen said in the nastiest possible tone, "I don't have to eat at the same table with him."

Joe said, trying to match her tone but failing because he wasn't a female, "If you did I wouldn't eat."

Which was all a lot of organic fertilizer. I took them to Gallagher's, where they not only ate at the same table, but devoured hunks of steak served from the same platter. It was a little after ten when we got to Nero Wolfe's place on 35th Street.

Wolfe was seated behind his desk, with the evening beer — one empty bottle and two full ones — on a tray in front of him. Joe Groll, in the red leather chair, also had a bottle and glass, on the check-writing table beside him. Helen Vardis would have made a good cheesecake shot over by the big globe in the upholstered number that Wolfe, himself, sometimes used. I was at my desk, as usual, with my oral report all finished, watching Wolfe inspect the workmanship of the removable bottom of the desk calendar.

He put it down, picked up one of the metal capsules with its dangling thread, and gave it another look, put that down too, and turned his half-closed eyes on Joe:

"Mr. Groll."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't know how much sense you have. If you have slightly more than your share, you must realize that if I hand these things to the police with Mr. Goodwin's story, they will conclude that you are a liar. They will ask, why did you wait until witnesses were present to explore those hiding places? Why did you think they were worth exploring at all? Is it even remotely credible that Mr. Blaney, after preparing that murderous box of cigars, would leave these things there on his desk in a hiding place that a dozen people know about? They will have other questions, but that's enough to show that they will end by concluding that you put the capsules in the calendar yourself. Where did you get them?"

Joe said firmly, "I wouldn't know about how much sense I've got, but it happened exactly the way you've heard it. As for my waiting for witnesses, I didn't. I only waited until I was sure Blaney was out of range, up at his Westchester place, and then Goodwin was there, and I asked him to come along on the spur of the moment. As for its being remotely credible what you said, there's nothing Blaney wouldn't do. He's a maniac. You don't know him, so you don't know that."

Wolfe grunted. "The devil I don't. I do know that. How long have those hiding places been in existence?"

"Some of them for years. Some are more recent."

Wolfe tapped the desk calendar with a finger.

"How long has this calendar been there?"

"Oh —" Joe considered. "Four or five years. It was there before I got in the Army. . . . Look here, Mr. Wolfe, you seem to forget that when I saw those things tonight I had no idea what they were, and I still haven't. You seem to know they're the same as the loads in those cigars, and if you do, okay, but I don't."

"Neither do I."

"Then what the hell? Maybe they're full of Chanel Number Five or just fresh air."

Wolfe nodded. "I was coming to that. If I show them to Mr. Cramer he'll take them away from me, and also he'll arrest you as a material witness, and I may possibly need you.

We'll have to find out for ourselves."

He pushed a button, and in a moment Fritz entered. Wolfe asked him, "Do you remember that metal percolator that someone sent us and we were fools enough to try?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you throw it out?"

"No, sir, it's in the basement."

"Bring it here, please."

Fritz went. Wolfe picked up a capsule and frowned at it and then turned to me: "Archie. Get me a piece of newspaper, the can of household oil, and a piece of string."

Under the circumstances I would have preferred to go out for a walk, but there was a lady present who might need protection, so I did as I was told. When I got back, Fritz was there with the percolator, which was two-quart size, made of thick metal. We three men collected at Wolfe's desk to watch the preparations, but Helen stayed in her chair.

With my scissors Wolfe cut a strip of newspaper about two by eight inches, dropped oil on it and rubbed it in with his finger, and rolled it tight into a long, thin, oiled wick. Then we held one end of it against the end of the capsule thread, overlapping a little, and Joe Groll, ready with the piece of string, tied them together. Wolfe opened the lid of the percolator.

"No," Joe objected. "That might stop it. Anyhow, we don't want this glass here."

He finished the job with his swift, sure fingers, while Wolfe and Fritz and I watched. Removing the glass cap and the inside contraption from the percolator, he lowered the capsule through the hole, hanging onto the free end of the oiled wick with one hand while with the other he stuffed a scrap of newspaper in the hole just tight enough to keep the wick from slipping on through. Wolfe nodded approvingly and leaned back in his chair. About two inches of the wick protruded.

"Put it on the floor." Wolfe pointed. "Over there."

Joe moved, taking a folder of matches from his pocket, but I intercepted him. "Wait a minute. Gimme." I took the percolator. "The rest of you go in the hall. I'll light it."

Fritz went, and so did Helen, but Joe merely backed to a corner and Wolfe didn't move from his chair.

I told Wolfe, "I saw Poor's face and you didn't. Go in the hall."

"Nonsense. That little thing?"

"Then I'll put a blanket over it."

"No. I want to see it."

"So do I," Joe said. "What the hell? I'll bet it's a dud."

I shrugged. "I hope Helen has had a course in first aid." I put the percolator on the floor over by the couch, about five paces from Wolfe's desk, lit a match and applied it to the end of the wick, and stood back and watched. An inch of the wick burned in three seconds. "See you at the hospital," I said cheerily, and beat it to the hall, leaving the door open a crack to see through.

It may have been ten seconds, but

it seemed like three times that, before the bang came, and it was a man-size bang, followed immediately by another but different kind of bang. Helen grabbed my arm, but not waiting to enjoy that, I swung the door open and stepped through. Joe was still in the corner, looking surprised. Wolfe had twisted around in his chair to gaze at a bruise in the plaster of the wall behind him.

"The percolator lid," he muttered. "It missed me."

"Yeah." I moved across to observe angles and directions. "By about an inch." I stooped to pick up the percolator lid, bent out of shape. "This would have felt good on your skull."

Fritz and Helen were back in, and Joe came over with the percolator in his hand. "Feel it," he said. "Hot. Look how it's twisted. Some pill, that is. Dynamite or TNT would never do that, not that amount. I wonder what's in it?"

"It's outrageous," Wolfe declared. I looked at him in surprise. Instead of being relaxed and thankful for his escape, he was sitting straight in his chair, which meant he was ready to pop with fury. "That thing nearly hit me in the head. This settles it. Against Mr. Poor there may have been a valid grievance. Against me, none."

"Well, for Pete's sake." I regarded him without approval. "That's illogical. Nobody aimed it at you. Didn't I tell you to go in the hall? However, if it made you mad enough to do a little work, fine. Here's Joe and Helen, you can start on them."

"No." He got to his feet. "I'm going to bed." He bowed to Helen. "Good night, Miss Vardis." He tilted his head a hundredth of an inch at Joe. "Good night, sir. . . . Archie, put these remaining capsules in the safe."

He marched to the door and was gone.

"Quite a guy," Joe remarked. "He didn't bat an eye when that thing went off and the lid flew past his ear."

"Yeah," I growled. "He has fits. He's having one now. Instead of taking you two apart and turning you inside out, which is what he should have done, he didn't even tell you where to head in. Do you tell the police about tonight or not? I would say, for the present, *not*. . . . Come on. Taxis are hard to find around here, and I've got to put the car away anyhow. I'll drop you somewhere."

We went. When I got back, some time later, I made a little discovery. Opening the safe to follow my custom of checking the cash last thing at night, I found two hundred bucks gone and an entry in the book for that amount in Wolfe's handwriting, which said, "Saul Panzer, advance on expenses."

So, anyhow, Saul was working.

Friday morning, having nothing else to do, I solved the case. I did it with cold logic. Everything fitted perfectly, and all I needed was enough evidence for a jury. Presumably that was what Saul Panzer was getting. I

do not intend to put it all down here, the way I worked it out, because, first, it would take three full pages, and, second, I was wrong. Anyway, I had it solved when, a little before nine o'clock, I was summoned to Wolfe's room and given an errand to perform, with detailed instructions. It sent me to 20th Street.

I would have just as soon have dealt with one of the underlings, but Cramer himself was in his office and said to bring me in. As I sat down, he whirled his chair a quarter turn, folded his arms, and asked conversationally, "What have you two liars got cooked up now?"

I grinned at him. "Why don't you call Wolfe a liar to his face some day? Do it while I'm there." I took two of the capsules, with threads attached, from my vest pocket and put them on his desk, and inquired, "Do you need any more of these?"

He picked one of them up and gave it a good look, then the other one; put them in a drawer of his desk, folded his arms again, and looked me in the eye to shrivel me.

"All right," he said quietly. "Go on. They came in the mail, in a package addressed to Wolfe with letters cut out of a magazine."

"No, sir; not at all. Where I spent the night last night I was idly running my fingers through her lovely hair and felt something, and there they were." Cramer was strictly a family man and had stern ideas. Seeing I had him blushing, I went on, "Actually, it was like this."

I told him the whole story.

He had questions, both during the recital and at the end, and I answered what I could. The one I had expected him to put first he saved till the last.

"Well," he said, "for the present we'll assume that I believe you. You know what that amounts to, but we'll assume it. Even so, how are you on figures? How much are two and one?"

"I'm pretty good. Two plus one plus one equals four."

"Yes? Where do you get that second plus one?"

"So you *can* add," I conceded. "Mr. Wolfe thought maybe you couldn't. However, so can we. Four capsules were found. Two are there in your drawer. One, as I told you, was used in a scientific experiment in Wolfe's office and damn' near killed him. He's keeping the other one for the Fourth of July."

"Like hell he is. I want it."

"Try and get it." I stood up.

"Beat it. I'll get it."

I turned, with dignity, and went.

When I got back to Wolfe's, Fritz met me in the hall to tell me there was a woman in the office, and when I entered I found it was Martha Poor.

I sat down at my desk and told her, "Mr. Wolfe will be engaged until eleven o'clock." I glanced at my wrist. "He'll be down in forty minutes."

She nodded. "I know. I'll wait."

She didn't look exactly bedraggled, nor would I say pathetic, but there was certainly nothing of the man-

eater about her. She seemed older than she had on Tuesday. Anyone could have told at a glance that she was having trouble, but whether it was bereavement or bankruptcy was indicated neither by her clothes nor by her expression. She made you feel like going up to her, maybe putting your hand on her shoulder or patting her on the arm, and asking, "Anything I can do?"

I went to the kitchen and asked Fritz if he had told Wolfe who had come to see him, and Fritz said he hadn't, he had left that to me. So I returned to the office, buzzed the plant-rooms, got Wolfe, and told him, "Returned from mission. I gave them to Cramer himself, and he says he'll get the other one. Mrs. Poor is down here waiting to see you."

"Confound that woman. Send her away."

"But she —"

"No. I know what she wants. I studied her. She wants to know what I'm doing to earn that money. Tell her to go home and read that receipt."

The line died. I swung my chair around and told Martha, "Mr. Wolfe says for you to go home and read the receipt."

She stared. "What?"

"He thinks you came to complain because he isn't earning the money your husband paid him, and the idea of having to earn money offends him. It always has."

"But — that's ridiculous. Isn't it?"

"Certainly it is." I fought back the impulse to step over and pat her on the shoulder. "But my advice is to humor him, much as I enjoy having you here. Nobody alive can handle him but me. If he came down and found you here he would turn around and walk out. If you have anything special to say, tell me, and I'll tell him. He'll listen to me because he has to or fire me, and he can't fire me because then he would never do any work at all and would eventually starve to death."

"I shouldn't think —" She stopped and stood up. She took a step toward the door, then turned and said, "I shouldn't think a cold-blooded murder is something to joke about."

I had to fight back the impulse again. "I'm not joking," I declared. "Plain facts. What did you want to say to him?"

"I just wanted a talk with him. He hasn't come to see me. Neither have you." She tried to smile, but all she accomplished was to start her lip quivering. She stopped it. "You haven't even phoned me. I don't know what's happening. The police asked me about two of my hairs being in that box of cigars, and I suppose they have told Mr. Wolfe about it, and I don't even know what he thinks or what he told the police."

I grinned at her. "That's easy. He made a speech to the jury, demonstrating that those hairs in the box were evidence that you did not kill your husband." I went to her and put a hand on her arm, like a brother. "Listen, lady. Isn't the funeral this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Go and have the funeral; that's enough for you for one day. Leave the rest to me. I mean, if anything occurs that it would help you to know about, I'll see that you know. Right?"

She didn't pull anything corny like grasping my hand, with hers firm and warm, or gazing at me with moist eyes filled with trust. She did meet my eyes, but only long enough to say, "Thank you, Mr. Goodwin," and turned to go. I went to the front door and let her out.

After Wolfe came down, the relations between us were nothing to brag about. Apparently he had nothing to offer, and I was too sore to start in on him.

He passed the time until lunch going through catalogues, and at 2:30 P. M., with a veal cutlet and half a bushel of Fritz's best mixed salad stowed in the hold, he returned to the office and resumed the catalogues. That got interrupted before long, but not by me. The bell rang and I went to the front, and it was Saul Panzer.

I took him to the office, where Wolfe greeted him and then told me, "Archie. Go up and help Theodore with the pollen lists."

I did my best with Theodore and the pollen lists, not wanting to take it out on them. The conference with Saul seemed to be comprehensive, since a full hour passed before the house phone in the potting-room buzzed. Theodore answered it, and told me that I was wanted downstairs.

When I got there Saul was gone. I had a withering remark prepared, thinking to open up with it, but had to save it for some other time. Wolfe was seated behind his desk, leaning back with his eyes closed, and his lips were moving, pushing out and then in again, out and in.

So I sat down and kept my mouth shut. The brain had actually got on the job, and I knew better than to make remarks, withering or not, during the performance of miracles. The first result, which came in ten or twelve minutes after I entered, did not, however, seem to be very miraculous. He opened his eyes halfway, grunted, and muttered, "Archie. Yesterday you showed me an article in a paper about a man's body found in an orchard near White Plains, but I didn't look at it. Now I want it."

"Yes, sir. There was more this morning —"

"Have they identified the body?"

"No, sir. The head was smashed —"

"Get it."

I obeyed. Newspapers were kept in the office for three days. I opened it to the page and handed it to him. He would read a newspaper only one way, holding it out wide open, no folding, with his arms stretched. I had never tried to get him to do it more intelligently because it was the only strenuous exercise he ever got and was therefore good for him. He finished the Thursday piece and asked for Friday's.

Then he told me, "Get the district attorney of Westchester County. What's his name? Fraser?"

"Right." I got busy with the phone. I had no trouble getting the office, but then they gave me the usual line about Mr. Fraser being in conference, and I had to put on pressure. Finally the elected person said hello.

Wolfe took it. "How do you do, Mr. Fraser? . . . Nero Wolfe. I have something to give you. That body found in an orchard Wednesday evening with the head crushed — has it been identified?"

Fraser was brusque: "No. What —?"

"Please. I'm giving you something. Put this down: Arthur Howell, 914 West 78th Street, New York. He worked for the Becker Products Corporation of Basston, New Jersey. They have an office at 622 East 42nd Street, New York. His dentist was Lewis Marley, 699 Park Avenue, New York. . . . That should help. Try that. In return for this, I would appreciate it very much if you will have me notified the moment the identification is made. Did you get it all?"

"Yes. But what —?"

"No, sir. That's all. That's all you'll get from me until I get word of the identification."

There was some sputtering protest from the White Plains end, but it accomplished nothing. Wolfe hung up, with a self-satisfied smirk on his big face, cleared his throat importantly, and picked up a catalogue.

I growled at him, "So it's in the bag. A complete stranger named Arthur Howell. After snitching the capsules from Becker Products and making the cigars and getting them into Poor's home God knows how, he was overcome by remorse and went to an orchard and took his clothes off and lay down and ran a car over himself with radio control —"

"Archie. Shut up. We are ready to act, in any case, but it will make things a little simpler if that corpse proves to be Mr. Howell, so it is worth waiting for a report on it." He glanced at the clock, which said seven minutes to four, and put the catalogue down. "We might as well prepare it now. Get that capsule from the safe."

I thought to myself, "This time it may not miss him, but, as for me, I'm going outdoors."

However, it appeared that he was going to try some new gag instead of repeating with the percolator. By the time I got the capsule from the safe and convoyed it to him, he had taken two articles from a drawer and put them on his desk. One was a roll of Scotch tape. The other was a medium-sized photograph of a man, mounted on gray cardboard. I gave it a glance, then picked it up and did a thorough job of looking. It was unquestionably Eugene R. Poor.

"Goody," I said enthusiastically. "No wonder you're pleased. Even if Saul had to pay two hundred bucks for it —"

"Archie. Let me have that. . . . Here, hold this thing."

I helped. What I was to hold was the capsule, flat on the cardboard near a corner, while he tore off a piece of tape and fastened it there. When he lifted the photo and jiggled it to see

if the fastening was firm, the thread dangled over Poor's right eye.

"Put it in an envelope and in the safe," he said, then glanced at the clock and made for the elevator.

At six o'clock he returned to the office, rang for Fritz to bring beer, and took up where he had left off with the catalogues. At eight o'clock Fritz summoned us to dinner. At nine-thirty we returned to the office. At a quarter to ten a phone call came from District Attorney Fraser. The body had been identified. It was Arthur Howell. An assistant district attorney and a pair of detectives were on their way to 35th Street to ask Wolfe how come.

Wolfe hung up, leaned back and sighed, and muttered at me, "Archie. You'll have to pay a call on Mrs. Poor. Saul will go with you."

I stared. "Saul?"

"Yes. He's up in my room asleep. He didn't get to bed last night. You will take her that photograph of her husband. You should leave as soon as possible, before that confounded Westchester lawyer gets here. I don't want to see him. Tell Fritz to bolt the door after you go. Ring my room and tell Saul to come down at once. Then I'll give you your instructions."

The appearance of the living-room in the Poor apartment on 84th Street was not the same as it had been when I had arrived there three evenings before. Not only was there no army of city employees present and no man of the house, with his face gone, huddled on the floor, but the furniture had been moved around. The chair Poor had sat in when he lit his last cigar was gone, probably to the cleaners on account of spots; the table Cramer had used for headquarters had been shifted to the other side of the room; and the radio had been moved to the other end of the couch. Martha Poor was sitting on the couch, and I was on a chair and I had pulled around to face her. She was wearing something that wasn't a bathrobe and wasn't exactly a dress, modest, with sleeves.

"I'm here under orders," I told her. "I said this morning that if anything happened that it would help you to know about I'd see that you knew, but this isn't it. This is different. Nero Wolfe sent me, with orders. I just want to make that clear. Item number one is to hand you this envelope and invite you to look at the contents."

She took it from me. With steady fingers, slow-moving rather than hurried, she opened the flap and pulled out the photograph.

I informed her, "That decoration may look like something by Dali, but it was Nero Wolfe's idea. I am not authorized to discuss it or the picture from any angle, just there it is, except to remark that it is a very good likeness of your husband. I only saw him that one time, the other afternoon at the office, but of course I had a long and thorough look at him. Wednesday we could have sold that photo to a newspaper for a nice amount, but of course we didn't have it Wednesday."

She had put the photo beside her on

the couch and was pinching an edge of the cardboard between her index finger and thumbnail, with the nail sinking in. She was looking straight at me. The muscles of her throat had tightened, which no doubt accounted for the change in her voice when she spoke: "Where did you get it?"

I shook my head. "Out of bounds. As I said, I'm under orders. . . . Item number two is just a piece of information to the effect that a man named Saul Panzer is out in the back hall on this floor, standing by the door of the service elevator. Saul is not big, but he just had a nap and is alert. . . . Number three: That naked body found up in Westchester with the head smashed by running a car over it, in an orchard not more than ten minutes' drive from either Monty's Tavern or Blaney's place, has been identified as formerly belonging to a man named Arthur Howell, an employee of the Becker Products Corporation."

Her eyes hadn't moved. I hadn't even seen the lashes blink. She said, in a faraway voice, "I don't know why you tell me about that. Arthur Howell? Did you say Arthur Howell?"

"Yep, that's right. Howell, Arthur. Head flattened to a pancake, but enough left for the dentist. As for telling you about it, I'm only obeying orders." I glanced at my wrist. "Number four: It is now twenty past ten. At a quarter to eleven I am supposed either to arrive back at the office or phone. If I do neither, Nero Wolfe will phone Inspector Cramer."

She got up and I thought she was going to take hold of me, but all she did was stand in front of me, about eight inches away, looking up at me. She came about up to my chin.

"Archie Goodwin," she said. "You think I'm terrible, don't you? You think I'm an awful woman, bad clear through. Don't you?"

"I'm not thinking, lady. I'm just an errand boy." The funny thing was that if at any moment up to then I had made a list of the ten most beautiful women she would not have been on it.

"You've had lots of experience," she said, her head back to look up at me. "You know what women are like. I knew you did when you put your hand on my arm yesterday. You know I'm a man's woman, but it has to be the right man. Just one man's, forever."

She started to smile, and her lip began to quiver, and she stopped it. "But I didn't find the man until it was too late. I didn't find him until you put your hand on my arm yesterday. You could have had me then, forever yours, you could have me now if anything like that was possible. I mean — we could go away together — now — you wouldn't have to promise anything — only you could find out if you want me forever too — the way I want you —"

She lifted her hand and touched me, just a touch, the tips of her fingers barely brushing my sleeve.

"Listen," I said, with my voice sounding peculiar, so I tried to correct it. "You are extremely good, no question about it, but, as you say, it's too

late. You are trying to go to bat when your side already has three out in the ninth, and that's against the rules. I'll hand it to you that you are extremely good. When you turn it on it flows. But in seven minutes, now, Nero Wolfe will phone the police."

She hauled off and smacked me in the face.

"I hate men," she said through her teeth. "God, how I hate men!"

She turned and walked to the bathroom, and closed the door.

I didn't know whether she had gone to fix her hair or what, and I didn't care. Instead of crossing to the window and standing there without breathing, as I had done before, I sat down on the edge of the couch and did nothing but breathe. I suppose I did actually know what was going to happen. Anyhow, when it happened, when the noise came, not nearly as loud as it had been in Wolfe's office, because the capsule had been inside a metal percolator, I don't think I jumped or even jerked. I did not run, but walked, to the bathroom door and opened it, and entered.

Less than a minute later I went to the back door in the kitchen and opened that, and told Saul Panzer, "All over. She stuck it in her mouth and lit the fuse. You get out. Go and report to Wolfe. I'll phone the cops."

"But you must be — I'll stay —"

"No, go on. Step on it. I feel fine."

At noon the next day, Saturday, I was getting fed up with all the jabber, because I had a question or two I wanted to ask myself. Cramer had come to Nero Wolfe's office prepared to attack from all sides at once, bringing not only Sergeant Purley Stebbins, but also a gang of civilians consisting of Helen Vardis, Joe Groll, and Conroy Blaney. Blaney had not been let in. On that Wolfe would not budge. Blaney was not to enter his house. The others had all been admitted and were now distributed around the office, with Cramer, of course, in the red leather chair. For over half an hour he and Wolfe had been closer to getting locked in a death grip than I had ever seen them.

Wolfe was speaking. "Then arrest me," he said. "Shut up, get a warrant, and arrest me."

Cramer, having said about all an inspector could say, merely glared.

"Wording the charge would be difficult," Wolfe murmured. When he was maddest he murmured. "I have not withheld evidence, or obstructed justice, or shielded the guilty. I thought it possible that Mrs. Poor, confronted suddenly with that evidence, would collapse and confess."

"Nuts," Cramer said wearily. "How about confronting me with the evidence? Instead of evidence, what you confront me with is another corpse. And I know" — he tapped the chair arm with a stiff finger — "exactly why. The only evidence you had that was worth a damn was that photograph of Arthur Howell. If you had turned it over to me —"

"Nonsense. You already had a photograph of Arthur Howell. The

Becker Products Corporation people gave you a picture of their missing employee on Thursday. So they told Saul Panzer when they gave him a duplicate for me. What good would one more picture of Howell do you?"

"Okay." Cramer was in a losing fight and knew it. "But I didn't know that Howell had come to see you on Tuesday with Mrs. Poor, passing himself off as her husband. Dressed in the same kind of suit and shirt and tie that Poor was wearing that day. Only you knew that."

I put in an entry: "Excuse me, but when you gentlemen finish the shadow-boxing I would like to ask a question." I was looking at Wolfe. "You say you knew Poor wasn't Poor. When and how?"

Of course, Wolfe faked. He sighed as if he was thinking, now, this is going to be an awful bore. Actually, he was always tickled stiff to show how bright he was.

His eyes came to me. "Wednesday evening you told me that Mr. Poor smoked ten to fifteen cigars a day. Thursday Mr. Cramer said the same thing. But the man who came here Tuesday, calling himself Poor, didn't even know how to hold a cigar, let alone smoke one."

"He was nervous."

"If he was he didn't show it, except with the cigar. You saw him. It was a ludicrous performance and he should never have tried it. When I learned that Mr. Poor was a veteran cigar smoker, the only question was who had impersonated him in this office? And the complicity of Mrs. Poor was obvious, especially with the added information, also furnished by Mr. Cramer, that no photograph of Mr. Poor was available. There are photographs of everybody nowadays. Mrs. Poor was an ass. She was supremely an ass when she selected me to bamboozle. She wanted to establish the assumption that Mr. Blaney was going to kill Mr. Poor. That was intelligent. She did not want to take her counterfeit Mr. Poor to the police, for fear someone there might be acquainted with the real Mr. Poor. That also was intelligent. But it was idiotic to choose me as the victim."

"She hated men," I remarked.

Wolfe nodded. "She must have had a low opinion of men. In order to get what she wanted, which presumably was something like half a million dollars — counting her husband's fortune, the insurance money, and a half-share in the business after Mr. Blaney had been executed for the murder of Mr. Poor — she was willing to kill three men, two by direct action and one indirectly. Incidentally, except for the colossal blunder of picking me, she was not a fool."

"The hell she wasn't," Cramer growled. "With all that trick setup? She was absolutely batty."

"No, sir." Wolfe shook his head. "She was not. Go back over it. She didn't manufacture the trick setup out of her head; she simply used what she had. On a certain day she found herself with these ingredients at hand: One, the hostility between the part-

ners in the business, amply corroborated by such details as Mr. Poor having Miss Vardis spy on Mr. Blaney, and Mrs. Poor, herself, having Mr. Groll do the same. . . . Two, her acquaintance with a man named Arthur Howell who had access to a supply of explosive capsules capable of concealment in a cigar, and who also sufficiently resembled her husband in build and general appearance, except for the face itself, and she intended to take care of the face.

"Ten of your men, Mr. Cramer, kept at it for a week or so, can probably trace her association with Mr. Howell. They're good at that. Unquestionably, it was those qualifications of Mr. Howell that suggested the details of her plan. She did not, of course, inform him that she hated men. Quite the contrary. She persuaded him to help her kill her husband, offering, presumably, a strong incentive."

"She was good at offering incentives," I declared. "She was good period."

Wolfe nodded. "I admit she was ingenious. . . . By the way, Mr. Groll, did she have an opportunity to conceal those four capsules in that desk calendar?"

"Yes," Joe said. "Helen and I were discussing that. She came there Tuesday to go with Poor to the rodeo, and she could have done it then."

"That was well conceived," Wolfe said approvingly. "That and the hairs in the box of cigars. She was preparing for all contingencies. Neither of those touches was meant for you, Mr. Cramer, but for a jury, in case it ever got to that. She had sense enough to know what a good lawyer could do with complications of that sort. . . . Will you gentlemen have some beer?"

"No," Cramer said bluntly. "I'll have a question. Poor wasn't here Tuesday afternoon?"

"No, sir. Arthur Howell was."

"Then where was Poor?"

"At the rodeo." Wolfe pushed a button, two pushes for beer. "Again Mrs. Poor was ingenious. Look at her schedule for Tuesday. She went to the Blaney & Poor office — what time, Mr. Groll?"

Helen answered: "She came around noon. They went to lunch together and then were going to the rodeo."

"Thank you. So all she had to do was to make some excuse and see that he went to the rodeo alone. It was an ideal selection — Madison Square Garden, that enormous crowd. Then she met Arthur Howell somewhere near, having arranged for him to be dressed as her husband was dressed, and brought him here. She was driving her car — or her husband's car. They left here a little before five o'clock. Between here and Forty-second Street he got out and went to Grand Central to take a train to White Plains. A woman who could persuade a man to help her kill her husband could surely persuade him to take a train to White Plains."

Fritz brought beer, and Wolfe opened a bottle and poured.

"Then she continued to Fiftieth

Street and met her husband as he left the rodeo, and they drove to Westchester, having an appointment to see Mr. Blaney at his place there. She talked her husband out of that, left him at a place called Monty's Tavern, drove somewhere, probably the White Plains railroad station, met Arthur Howell there as arranged, drove to an isolated spot probably previously selected, turned off the road into an orchard, killed Mr. Howell or knocked him unconscious with whatever she used for that purpose, removed his clothing and ran the car over him to obliterate his face."

A noise came from Helen Vardis. She had obliterated her own face by covering it with her hands. That gave Joe an excuse to touch her, which he did.

"Granted her basic premise," Wolfe went on, "she couldn't very well have been expected to let Arthur Howell continue to live. She would never have had a carefree moment. What if Mr. Goodwin or I had met him on the street? That thought should have occurred to him, but apparently something about Mrs. Poor had made him quit thinking."

He drank beer. "She proceeded. First to Mr. Blaney's place, to make sure, by looking through windows, that he was alone there, so that she could safely say that she had gone to see him and couldn't find him. Again she was providing for all contingencies. If Arthur Howell's body was, after all, identified, known as that of a man who was with the Becker Products Corporation and had access to those capsules, it would help to have it established that Mr. Blaney had not been at home during the time that Arthur Howell had been killed."

He emptied the glass. "The rest is anticlimax, though, of course, for her it was the grand consummation. She returned to Monty's Tavern, told her husband Mr. Blaney had not been at home, dined with him, drove back to New York and went to their apartment, and got him a nice fresh cigar from a new box. Everything worked perfectly. It sounds more complicated than it really was."

"That receipt you signed," Cramer growled.

"What? Oh. That gave her no difficulty. Arthur Howell gave the receipt to her, naturally, and she put it in her husband's pocket. That was important. It was probably the first thing she did after the cigar exploded."

"Meanwhile, you've got the five thousand dollars."

"Yes, sir. I have."

"But Poor didn't pay it to you. You never saw Poor. You weren't hired by him. If you want to say Mrs. Poor paid it, do you take money from murderers?"

It was one of Cramer's feeblest attempts to be nasty, certainly not up to his standard.

Wolfe merely poured beer and said, "*Pfui!* Whether Mr. Poor paid me the five thousand or not, he got his money's worth."

Try analyzing the logic of that. I can't.

— Continued from back cover

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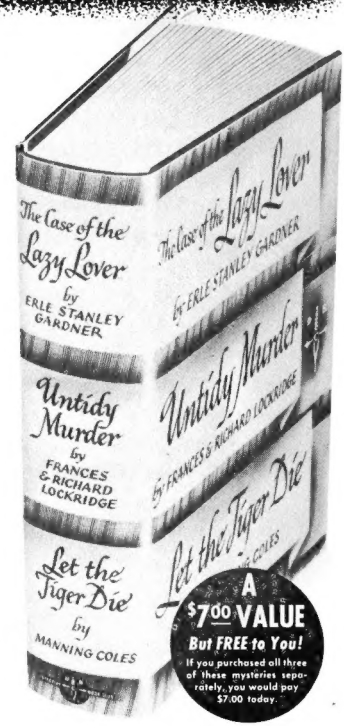
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